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EXPOSITIONS

MARK

by Alexander Maclaren

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THE

GOSPEL OF ST. MARK

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D., LITT.D.

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LESSON I

The Strong Forerunner and the Stronger Son

ST. MARK i. 1-11

1. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

2. As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee.

3. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.

4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5. And there went out unto him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

6. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;

7. And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

8. I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

9. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

10. And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him:

11. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

THE first words of "In Memoriam" might be taken to describe the theme of Mark's Gospel. It is the "strong Son of God" whom he sets forth in his rapid,

impetuous narrative, which is full of fiery energy, and delights to paint the unresting continuity of Christ's filial service. His theme is not the King, as in Matthew; nor the Son of man, as in Luke; nor the eternal Word manifested in flesh, as in John. Therefore he neither begins by tracing His kingly lineage, as does the first evangelist; nor by dwelling on the humanities of wedded life and the sacredness of the family since He has been born; nor by soaring to the abysses of the eternal abiding of the Word with God, as the agent of creation, the medium of life and light; but plunges at once into his subject, and begins the Gospel with the mission of the forerunner, which melts immediately into the appearance of the Son.

I. We may note first, in this lesson, the prelude, including verses 1, 2, and 3. We need not discuss the grammatical connection of these verses, or the relation of verses 2 and 3 to the following section. However that be settled, the result, for our present purpose, is the same. Mark considers that John's mission is the beginning of the gospel. Here are two noteworthy points,—his use of that well-worn word, "the gospel," and his view of John's place in relation to it. The gospel is the narrative of the facts of Christ's life and death. Later usage has taken it to be, rather, the

statement of the truths deducible from these facts, and especially the proclamation of salvation by the power of Christ's atoning death; but the primitive application of the word is to the history itself. So Paul uses it in his formal statement of the gospel which he preached, with the addition, indeed, of the explanation of the meaning of Christ's death (1 Cor. xv. 1-6). The very name "good news" necessarily implies that the gospel is, primarily, history; but we cannot exclude from the meaning of the word the statement of the significance of the facts, without which the facts have no message of blessing. Mark adds the dogmatic element when he defines the subject of the Gospel as being "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." In the remainder of the book the simple name "Jesus" is used; but here, in starting, the full, solemn title is given, which unites the contemplation of Him in His manhood, in His office as fulfiller of prophecy and crown of revelation, and in His mysterious, Divine nature.

Whether we regard verses 2 and 3 as connected grammatically with the preceding or the following verses, they equally refer to John, and define his position in relation to the Gospel. The Revised Version restores the true reading, "in Isaiah the prophet," which some unwise and timid transcriber has, as he thought, mended

into "the prophets," for fear that an error should be found in Scripture. Of course, verse 2 is not Isaiah's, but Malachi's; but verse 3, which is Isaiah's, was uppermost in Mark's mind, and his quotation of Malachi is, apparently, an afterthought, and is plainly merely introductory of the other, on which the stress lies. The remarkable variation in the Malachi quotation, which occurs in all three evangelists, shows how completely they recognised the Divinity of our Lord in their making words which, in the original, are addressed by Jehovah to Himself, to be addressed by the Father to the Son. There is a difference in the representation of the office of the forerunner in the two prophetic passages. In the former "he" prepares the way of the coming Lord; in the latter he calls upon "his hearers" to prepare it. In fact, John prepared the way, as we shall see presently, just by calling on men to do so. In Mark's view, the first stage in the gospel is the mission of John. He might have gone further back—to the work of prophets of old, or to the earliest beginnings in time of the self-revelation of God, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does; or he might have ascended even higher up the stream—to the true "beginning," from which the fourth evangelist starts. But his distinctly practical genius leads him to fix his gaze on the historical fact of

John's mission, and to claim for it a unique position, which he proceeds to develop.

II. So we have, next, the strong servant and forerunner (verses 4-8). The abruptness with which the curtain is drawn, and the gaunt figure of the desert-loving ascetic shown us, is very striking. It is like the way in which Elijah, his prototype, leaps, as it were, full-armed, into the arena. The parallel passage in Matthew links his appearance with the events which it has been narrating by the phrase "in these days," and calls him "the Baptist." Mark has no such words, but lets him stand forth in his isolation. The two accounts may profitably be compared. Their likenesses suggest that they rest on a common basis, probably of oral tradition, while their differences are, for the most part, significant. Mark differs in his arrangement of the common matter, in omissions, and in some variations of expression. Each account gives a general summary of John's teaching at the beginning; but Matthew puts emphasis on the Baptist's proclamation that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, to which nothing in Mark corresponds. His Gospel does not dwell on the royalty of Jesus, but rather represents Him as the servant than as the king. Mark begins with describing John as baptizing, which only appears later in Matthew's account. Mark omits all

reference to the Sadducees and Pharisees, and to John's sharp words to them. He has nothing about the axe laid to the trees, nothing about the children of Abraham, nothing about the fan in the hand of the great Husbandman. All the theocratic aspect of the Messiah, as proclaimed by John, is absent; and, as there is no reference to the fire which destroys, so neither is there to the fire of the Holy Ghost, in which he baptizes. Mark reports only John's preaching and baptism of repentance, and his testimony to Christ as stronger than he, and as baptizing with the Holy Ghost.

So, on the whole, Mark's picture brings out prominently the following traits in John's personality and mission:— First, his preparation for Christ by preaching repentance. The truest way to create in men a longing for Jesus, and to lead to a true apprehension of His unique gift to mankind, is to evoke the penitent consciousness of sin. The preacher of guilt and repentance is the herald of the bringer of pardon and purity. That is true in reference to the relation of Judaism and Christianity, of John and Jesus, and is as true to-day as ever it was. The root of maimed conceptions of the work and nature of Jesus Christ is a defective sense of sin. When men are roused to believe in judgment, and to realise their own evil, they are ready to listen to the blessed news

of a Saviour from sin and its curse. The Christ whom John heralds is the Christ that men need; the Christ whom men receive, without having been out in the wilderness with the stern preacher of sin and judgment, is but half a Christ—and it is the vital half that is missing.

Again, Mark brings out his personal asceticism. He omits much; but he could not leave out the picture of the grim, lean solitary, who stalked among soft-robed men, like Elijah come to life again, and held the crowds by his self-chosen privations no less than by his fierce, fiery eloquence. His desert life and contempt for ease and luxury spoke of a strength of character and purpose which fascinated commoner men, and make the next point the more striking—namely, the utter humility with which this strong, self-reliant, fiery rebuker of sin, and despiser of rank and official dignities, flings himself at the feet of the coming One. He is strong, as his life and the awestruck crowds testified. How strong must that Other be! He feared not the face of man, nor owned inferiority to any; but his whole soul melted into joyful submission, and confessed unworthiness even to unlace the sandals of that mightier One. His transitional position is also plainly marked by our evangelist. He is the end of prophecy, the beginning of the Gospel,

belonging to neither or to both. He is not merely a prophet, for he is prophesied of as well; and he stands so near Him whom he foretells, that his prediction is almost fact. He is not an evangelist, nor, in the closest sense, a servant of the coming Christ; for his lowly confession of unworthiness does not imply merely his humility, but accurately defines the limits of his function. It was not for him to bear or to loose that Lord's sandals. There were those who did minister to Him, and the least of those, whose message to the world was "Christ has come," had the honour of closer service than that greatest among women-born, whose task was to run before the chariot of the King and tell that He was at hand.

III. We have the gentle figure of the stronger Son. The introduction of Jesus is somewhat less abrupt than that of John; but if we remember whom Mark believed Him to be, the quiet words which tell of His first appearance are sufficiently remarkable. There is no mention of His birth or previous years. His deeds will tell who He is. The years before His baptism were of no moment for Mark's purpose. Nor has he any report of the precious conversation of Jesus with John, when the forerunner testified to Christ's purity, which needed no washing nor repentance, and acknowledged at once

his own sinfulness and the Lord's cleansing power, and when Christ accepted the homage, and, by implication, claimed the character, purity, and power which John attributed to Him. The omission may be accounted for on a principle which seems to run through all this Gospel—of touching lightly, or omitting indications of our Lord's dignity, and dwelling by preference on His acts of lowliness and service. The baptism is recorded; but the conversation, which showed that the King of Israel, in submitting to it, acknowledged no need of it for Himself, but regarded it as "fulfilling righteousness," is passed by. The sinlessness of Jesus, and the special meaning of His baptism, are sufficiently shown by the descending Spirit and the approving voice. These Mark does record; for they warrant the great name by which, in his first verse, he has described Jesus as "the Son of God."

The brief account of these is marked by the evangelist's vivid pictorial faculty, which we shall frequently have to notice as we read the Gospel. Here he puts us, by a word, in the position of eye-witnesses of the scene, as it is passing, when he describes the heavens as "being rent asunder"—a much more forcible and pictorial word than Matthew's "opened." He says nothing of John's share in the vision. All is intended for the Son. It is

Jesus who sees the rending heavens and the descending dove. The voice which Matthew represents as speaking *of* Christ, Mark represents as speaking *to* Him.

The baptism of Jesus, then, was an epoch in His own consciousness. It was not merely His designation to John or to others as Messiah, but for Himself the sense of sonship, and the sunlight of Divine complacency filled His spirit in new measure or manner. Speaking as we have to do from the outside, and knowing but dimly the mysteries of his unique personality, we have to speak modestly and little. But we know that our Lord grew, as to His manhood, in wisdom, and that His manhood was continually the receiver, from the Father, of the Spirit; and the reality of His Divinity, as dwelling in His manhood from the beginning of that manhood, is not affected by the belief that when the dove-like Spirit floated down on His meek head, glistening with the water of baptism, His manhood then received a new and special consciousness of His Messianic office and of His Sonship.

Whilst that voice was for His sake, it was for others too; for John himself tells us (John i.) that the sign had been told him beforehand, and that it was his sight of the descending dove which heightened his thoughts and gave a new turn to his testimony, leading him to

know and to show "that this is the Son of God." The rent heavens have long since closed, and that dread voice is silent; but the fact of that attestation remains on record, that we, too, may hear through the centuries God speaking of and to His Son, and may lay to heart the commandment to us, which naturally follows God's witness to Jesus, "Hear ye Him."

The symbol of the dove may be regarded as a prophecy of the gentleness of the Son. Thus early in His course the two qualities were harmonised in Him, which so seldom are united, and each of which dwelt in Him in Divinest perfection, both as to degree and manner. John's anticipations of the strong coming One looked for the manifestations of His strength in judgment and destruction. How strangely his images of the axe, the fan, the fire, are contrasted with the reality, emblemed by this dove, dropping from heaven, with sunshine on its breast, and peace in its still wings! Through the ages, Christ's strength has been the strength of gentleness, and His coming has been like that of Noah's dove, with the olive-branch in its beak, and the tidings of an abated flood and of a safe home in its return. The ascetic preacher of repentance was strong to shake and purge men's hearts by terror; but the stronger Son comes to conquer by meekness, and reign by the

omnipotence of love. The beginning of the gospel was the anticipation and the proclamation of strength like the eagle's, swift of flight, and powerful to strike and destroy. The gospel, when it became a fact, and not a hope, was found in the meek Jesus, with the dove of God, the gentle Spirit, which is mightier than all, nestling in His heart, and uttering soft notes of invitation through His lips.

LESSON II

Mighty in Word and Deed

ST. MARK i. 21-34

"21. And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day He entered into the synagogue, and taught.

22. And they were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

33. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

24. Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God.

25. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

26. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

27. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him.

28. And immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

29. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell Him of her.

31. And He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up: and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

32. And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.

33. And all the city was gathered together at the door.

34. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew Him."

NONE of the incidents in this lesson are peculiar to Mark, but the special stamp of his Gospel is on them all; and, both in the narration of each and in the

swift transition from one to another, the impression of Christ's strength and unpausing diligence in filial service is made. The short hours of that first sabbath's ministry are crowded with work; and Christ's energy bears Him through exhausting physical labours, and enables Him to turn with unwearied sympathy and marvellous celerity to each new form of misery, and to throw Himself with freshness undiminished into the relief of each. The homely virtue of diligence shines out in this lesson no less clearly than superhuman strength, that tames demons and heals all manner of sickness. There are four pictures here, compressed and yet vivid. Mark can condense and keep all the essentials, for his keen eye and sure hand go straight to the heart of his incidents.

I. The strong Son of God teaching with authority. "They enter." We see the little group, consisting of Jesus and of the two pairs of brothers, in whose hearts the mighty conviction of His Messiahship had taken root. Simon and Andrew were at home, in Capernaum; but we may, perhaps, infer from the manner in which the sickness of Peter's wife's mother is mentioned, that Peter had not been to his house till after the synagogue service. At all events, these four were already detached from ordinary life and bound to Him as disciples. We meet here with our first instance of Mark's favourite

"straightway," the recurrence of which, in this chapter, so powerfully helps the impression of eager and yet careful swiftness with which Christ ran His course, "unhasting, unresting." From the beginning, Mark stamps His life with the spirit of our Lord's own words, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh." And yet there is no hurry, but the calm, equable rapidity with which planets move. The unostentatious manner of Christ's beginning is noteworthy. He seeks to set Himself in the line of the ordinary teaching of the day. He knew all the faults of the synagogue and the rabbis, and He had come to revolutionise the very conception of religious teaching and worship; but He prefers to intertwine the new with the old, and to make as little disturbance as possible. It is easy to get the cheap praise of "originality," by brushing aside existing methods. It is harder and nobler to use whatever methods may be going, and to breathe new value and life into them. Drowsy, hair-splitting disputations about nothings and endless casuistry were the staple of the synagogue talk; but when He opened His mouth there, the weary formalism went out of the service, and men's hearts glowed again when they once more heard a Voice that lived, speaking from a Soul that saw the invisible. Mark has no mission to record much

of our Lord's sayings. His Gospel deals more with deeds. The sermon he does not give, but the hearer's comment he does. Matthew has the same words at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, from which it would seem that they were part of the oral tradition which underlies the written Gospels; but Mark probably has them in their right place. Very naturally, the first synagogue discourse in Capernaum would surprise. Deeper impressions might be made by its successors, but the first hearing of that voice would be an experience that could never be repeated. The feature of His teaching which astonished the villagers most was its "authority." That fits in with the impression of strength which Mark wishes to make. Another thing that struck them was its unlikeness to the type of synagogue teaching to which they had been accustomed all their lives. They had got so accustomed to the droning dreariness and trivial subtleties of the rabbis that it had never entered their heads that there could be any other way of teaching religion than boring men with interminable pedantries about trifles of ritual or outward obedience. This new teacher would startle all, as an eagle suddenly appearing in a sanhedrin of owls. He would shock many; he would fascinate a few. Nor was it only the dissimilarity of His teaching, but also its authority, that was strange. The scribes

spoke with authority enough of a sort, lording it over the despised common people—"men of the earth," as they called them—and exacting punctilious obedience and much obsequiousness; but authority over the spirit they had none. They pretended to no power but as expositors of a law; and they fortified themselves by citations of what this, that, and the other rabbi had said, which was all their learning. Christ quoted no one. He did not even say, "Moses has said." He did not even preface His commands with a "Thus saith the Lord." He spoke of His own authority: "Verily, *I say* unto you." Other teachers explained the law; He is a lawgiver. Others drew more or less pure waters from cisterns; He is in Himself a well of water, from which all may draw. To us, as to these rude villagers in the synagogue of the little fishing-town, Christ's teaching is unique in this respect. He does not argue; He affirms. He seeks no support from others' teachings; He alone is sufficient for us. He not only speaks the truth, which needs no other confirmation than His own lips, but He is the truth. We may canvass other men's teachings, and distinguish their insight from their errors; we have but to accept His. The world outgrows all others; it can only grow up towards the fulness of His. Us and all the ages He teaches with authority, and the

guarantee for the truth of His teaching is Himself. "Verily, verily, I say unto you." No other man has a right to say that to me. But Christ dominates the race, and the strong Son of God is the world's Teacher.

II. The strong conqueror of demons. Again we have "straightway." The language seems to imply that this wretched sufferer burst hurriedly into the synagogue and broke the utterance of astonishment by giving it new food. Perhaps the double consciousness of the demoniac may be recognised, the humanity being drawn to Jesus by some disturbed longings, the demoniac consciousness, on the other hand, being repelled. It is no part of my business to discuss demoniacal possession. I content myself with remarking that I, for one, do not see how Christ's credit as a Divine Teacher is to be saved without admitting its reality, nor how such phenomena as the demoniac's knowledge of His nature are to be accounted for on the hypothesis of disease or insanity. It is assuming rather too encyclopædiacal a knowledge to allege the impossibility of such possession. There are facts enough around us still, which would be at least as satisfactorily accounted for by it as by natural causes; but as to the incident before us, Mark puts it all into three sentences, each of which is pregnant with suggestions. There is, first, the demoniac's shriek of

hatred and despair. Christ had said nothing. If, as we suppose, the man had broken in on the worship, drawn to Jesus, he is no sooner in His presence than the other power that darkly lodged in him overpowers him, and pours out fierce passions from his reluctant lips. There is dreadful meaning in the preposition here used, "a man *in* an unclean spirit," as if his human self was immersed in that filthy flood. The words embody three thoughts—the fierce hatred, which disowns all connection with Jesus; the wild terror, which asks or affirms Christ's destructive might over all foul spirits (for the "us" means not the man and the demon, but the demon and his fellows); and the recognition of Christ's holiness, which lashes unholiness into a paroxysm of mingled despair and hate. Does this sound like a madman, or an epileptic, or like a spirit which knew more than men knew, and trembled and hated more than they could do? There is nothing more terrible than the picture, self-drawn in these spasmodic words, of a spirit which, by its very foulness, is made shudderingly sensitive to the disturbing presence of purity, and would fain have nothing to do with Him whom it recognises for the Holy One of God, and therefore its destroyer. Foul things that lurk under stones hurry out of the light when you lift the covering. Spirits that love the darkness are

hurt by the light. It is possible to recognise Jesus for what He is, and to hate Him all the more. What a miserable state that is, to hope that we shall have nothing to do with Him! These wild utterances, seething with evil passions and fierce detestation, do point to the possible terminus for men. A black gulf opens in them, from which we are meant to start back with the prayer, "Preserve me from going down into that pit!"

What a contrast to the tempest in the demoniac's wild and whirling words is the calm speech of Christ! He knows His authority, and His word is imperative, curt, and assured: "Hold thy peace"; literally, "Be muzzled," as if the creature were a dangerous beast, whose raving and snapping must be stopped. Jesus wishes no acknowledgments from such lips. They who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean. He had taught with authority, and now He in like manner commands. His teaching rested on His own assurance. His miracle is done by His own power. That power is put forth by His simple word; that is to say, the bare exercise or expression of His will is potent.

The third step in the narrative is the immediate obedience of the demon. Reluctant but compelled, malicious to the last, doing the house he has to leave all the harm he can, and though no longer venturing

to speak, yet venting his rage and mortification, and acknowledging his defeat by one parting howl, he comes out.

Again, we are bid to note the impression produced. The interrupted buzz of talk begins once more, and is vividly reported by the fragmentary sentences of verse 27, and by the remark that it was "among themselves" that they compared notes. Two things startled the people:—First, the "new teaching"; and second, the authority over demons, into which they naturally generalise the one instance. The busy tongues were not silenced when they left the synagogue. Verse 28 shows what happened, in one direction, when the meeting broke up. With another "straightway," Mark paints the swift flight of the rumour over all the district, and somewhat overleaps the strict line of chronology. To let us hear how far the echo of such a blow sounded, this first miracle recorded by him is as a duel between Christ and the strong man armed, who keeps his house. The shield of the great oppressor is struck first in challenge by the champion, and His first essay at arms proves Him mightiest. Such a victory well heads the chronicle.

III. The tenderness of the strong Son. We come back to the strict order of succession with another "straightway," which opens a very different scene. The

Authorised Version gives three "straightways" in the three verses as to the cure of Peter's mother-in-law. "Immediately" they go to the house; "immediately" they tell Jesus of her; "immediately" the fever leaves her; and even if we omit the third of these, as the Revised Version does, we cannot miss the rapid haste of the narrative, which reflects the unwearied energy of the Master. Peter and Andrew had apparently been ignorant of the sickness till they reached the house, from which the inference is not that it was a slight attack which had come on after they went to the synagogue, but that the two disciples had so really left house and kindred, that, though in Capernaum, they had not gone home till they took Jesus there for rest and quiet and food after the toil of the morning. The owners would naturally first know of the sickness, which would interfere with their hospitable purpose; and so Mark's account seems more near the details than Matthew's, inasmuch as the former says that Jesus was "told" of the sick woman, while Matthew's version is that He "saw" her. Luke says that they "besought Him for her." No doubt that was the meaning of "telling" Him; but Mark's representation brings out very beautifully the confidence already beginning to spring in their hearts, that He needed but to know in order to heal, and the

reverence which hindered them from direct asking. The instinct of the devout heart is to tell Christ all its troubles, great or small; and He does not need beseeching before He answers. He did not need to be told either, but He would not rob us of the solace of confiding all our griefs to Him.

Their confidence was not misplaced. No moment intervenes unused between the tidings and the cure. "He came," as if He had been in some outer room, or not yet in the house, and now passes into the sick-chamber. Then comes one of Mark's minute and graphic details, in which we may see the keen eye and faithful memory of Peter. He "took her by the hand, and lifted her up." Mark is fond of telling of Christ's taking by the hand; as, for instance, the little child whom He set in the midst, the blind man whom He healed, the child with the dumb spirit. His touch has power. His grasp means sympathy, tenderness, identification of Himself with us, the communication of upholding, restoring strength. It is a picture, in a small matter, of the very heart of the gospel. He layeth not hold of angels, but He layeth hold of the seed of Abraham. It is a lesson for all who would help their fellows, that they must not be too dainty to lay hold of the dirtiest hand, both metaphorically and literally, if they want their

sympathy to be believed. His hand banishes not only the disease, but its consequences. Immediate convalescence and restoration to strength follow; and the strength is used, as it should be, in ministering to the Healer who, notwithstanding His power, needed the humble ministration and the poor fare of the fisherman's hut. What a lesson for all Christian homes is here! Let Jesus know all that troubles them, welcome Him as a guest, tell Him everything, and He will cure all diseases and sorrows, or give the light of His presence to make them endurable. Consecrate to Him the strength which He gives, and let deliverances teach trust, and inflame grateful love, which delights in serving Him who needs no service, but delights in all.

IV. The strong Son, unwearied by toil and sufficient for all the needy. Each incident in this lesson has a note of the impression it made appended. Verses 32-34 give the united result of all, on the people of Capernaum. They wait till the Sabbath is past, and then, without thought of His long day of work, crowd round the house with their sick. The sinking sun brought no rest for Him, but the new calls found Him neither exhausted nor unwilling. Capernaum was but a little place, and the whole city might well be "gathered together at the door," some sick, some bearing the sick, all curious and

eager. There was no depth in the excitement. There was earnestness enough, no doubt, in the wish for healing, but there was no insight into His message. Any travelling European with a medicine chest can get the same kind of *cortège* round his tent. These people, who hung upon Him thus, were those of whom He had afterwards to say that it would be more tolerable for Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for them. But though He knew the shallowness of the impression, He was not deaf to the misery; and, with power which knew no weariness, and sympathy which had no limit, and a reservoir of healing virtue which the day's draughts had not emptied by a hair's-breadth, He heals them all. Remarkable is the prohibition of the demons' speech. They knew Him, while men were ignorant; for they had met Him before to-day. He would have no witness from them; not merely, as has been said, because their attestation would hinder, rather than further, His acceptance by the people, nor because they may be supposed to have spoken in malice, but because a divine decorum forbade that He should accept acknowledgments from such tainted sources.

So ended this first of "the days of the Son of man," which our evangelist records. It was a day of hard toil, of merciful and manifold self-revelation. As teacher

and doer, in the synagogue, and in the home, and in the city; as Lord of the dark realms of evil and of disease; as ready to hear hinted and dumb prayers, and able to answer them all; as careless of His own ease, and ready to spend Himself for others' help,—Jesus showed Himself, on that Sabbath day, strong and tender, the Son of God and the servant of men.

LESSON III

The Leper and the Lord: a Parable

St. Mark i. 35-45

35. "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

36. And Simon and they that were with him followed after Him.

37. And when they had found Him, they said unto Him, All men seek for Thee.

38. And He said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.

39. And He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

40. And there came a leper to Him, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to Him, and saying unto Him, If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.

41. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand, and touched him, and said unto him, I will; be thou clean.

42. And as soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

43. And He straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away.

44. And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the Priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

45. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places; and they came to Him from every quarter."

MARK'S Gospel gives special prominence to Christ's toilsome work. It is the Gospel of the Son who is the Servant; and, just because of this point of view

it also makes very prominent the seasons of rest and solitude by which Jesus repaired His wearied energy and bathed His spirit in communion with the Father. That long, hard day in Capernaum needed some short, deep sleep, to restore His physical power. But it needed more solitary prayer; and so the first verses of this lesson tell of His stealing from the slumbering town and seeking the loneliness of the hills behind Capernaum, to hold converse with God. The harder our work, the more we need solitude and prayer, without which work becomes mechanical and insincere. Preachers, revivalists, and all those whose Christian calling requires them to be much in public, and to handle sacred things for the good of others, must live much alone with God, and secure many an hour of still communion, if their words are to be anything better than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals. For want of that, many a man has talked away his religion, and never found out how little his words to others represented his real, indifferent self. Hence come all sorts of unrealities, vehement efforts to pretend to an earnestness which is not genuine. A Christian worker must either pray much or deteriorate into an actor. What Jesus needed we cannot do without. To Him solitude was blessed. He with whom God dwells is never less

alone than when alone; for then he enjoys without interruption God in himself, and himself in God. Solitude is the mother-country of the strong. The true "deepening of the spiritual life" is better sought in the desert-place than in "conventions."

But Christ's retirement was no selfish seclusion, nor did His desire for it keep remote for one moment from the calls upon Him. While men slept, He prayed. But when the eager group, headed by Peter, who already takes the lead, burst in upon Him, He has no impatience, nor rebukes the scarcely-concealed tone of almost remonstrance with which they tell Him how everybody—by which big word they only meant the handful of inhabitants in Capernaum—was seeking Him. They all but say that He has deserted His duty, and they take for granted that He will at once return. But while He owns the call to service, and surrenders the sweetness of His lonely morning hours without a sigh, He sees in the excitement in Capernaum a reason for going "into the next towns." Enough had been done in the former place. More might be harmful; and it was well that the mere flutter of excitement should have time to quiet. Many of us would have said, "Capernaum is ready for evangelistic work. We must strike while the iron is hot!" Perhaps our work would gain in solidity what it

wanted in noise if we pondered this act of Christ's, and learned that there is an excitement which is no help, but a positive hindrance to His work. Note, too, that majestic though obscure implication of pre-existence, in "therefore came I forth." From whence did He come? From the bosom of the Father. Thus early in this Gospel, which ordinarily presents rather the lowliness than the majesty of the Son, is He represented as letting fall hints of His unique glory.

The swift activity, interrupted for a moment by that morning of communion, is resumed; and again He traverses Galilee, rapid and beneficent as a sunbeam. The story of the leper is connected with this journey, marked by so many miracles. Some tidings of the new Teacher had reached the huts where the lepers herded, and had stirred in one poor wretch a faint flicker of hope, which emboldened him to break through ceremonial restrictions, and to force his tainted and unwelcome presence into the shrinking crowd. He seems to have stolen or burst in suddenly; and we can see him with his horrible, white face, his tightened, shining skin, his eating ulcers, some frowsy rag over his face, and a hunted look in his eyes, like a wild beast, as he passes through the recoiling crowd, and flings himself down at the feet of the calm Teacher, with his piteous cry. He

waited for no pause or question. Misery and earnestness are not polite.

The true point of view for understanding this miracle is to regard it as being a parable as well as a miracle. Leprosy was exceptionally treated in the Mosaic law, and the restrictions on its victim, as well as the ritual for the rare cases in which the disease wore itself out, are best regarded as symbolical, rather than as sanitary. It was an emblem of sin, fitted to be such by its hideous symptoms, its slow, stealthy, steady progress, and its defiance of all known means of cure. Remembering this deeper meaning, we find large truths in the story.

I. Note the leper's cry. His keen sense of misery impels him to passionate desire for healing. A man with the flesh dropping off his bones could not suppose himself well. The parallel fails here; for the misery of sin is that its ravages are less known by the sufferer than by the spectator. There are diseases in which the victim thinks himself in health, while everybody else can see death staring out of his eyes. So with sin. The worse we are, the less we know it, and the more we are in love with what is killing us. Hence the eagerness of this poor man to get his leprosy cleansed contrasts with the indifference of men as to soul-healing.

Note the leper's confidence. He was quite sure of

Christ's power to heal. He had heard enough of His doings to be so. Not that his confidence had any religious element in it. Matthew makes him say, "Lord . . . Thou canst"; but Mark, in accordance with his habit of passing lightly by the indications of our Lord's dignity, leaves out the word, and so puts the confidence as extending merely to the fact of healing, without thought of His person. It was faith in the making, but without any spiritual element. If we turn from the symbol to the fact, we have to think of the omnipotent ability of Jesus to deliver from sin, both as regards its guilt and its power. His great sacrifice atones for all sin; and His blood, applied to the soul that walks in light, cleanses, by daily-renewed and increasing power, from all sin. Forgiveness and sanctifying are possible for the foulest. However inveterate and chronic the leprosy, however far the corruption may have spread, and however deep it may have struck its filthy fangs, there is perfect cure possible. Christ's "can" is omnipotent.

Note the leper's doubt. "If Thou wilt." He had no right to presume on Christ's willingness. He knew nothing of the principle on which the mercy was distributed; but, for all he knew, it might be from mere accidental direction of capricious good-nature. There-

fore he comes with a modest prayer; but it breathes entreaty quite as much as doubt. It means that nothing stands between him and healing but Christ's will, and it implies that to heal would be so easy; that not to heal would be cruel. It throws the responsibility of his continued leprosy on Christ's shoulders, and so makes a piteous appeal to Him. The leper's doubt is our certainty. We know the principle on which Christ's mercy flows. We know that it includes the whole world, and that if any leper remains unhealed, the fault lies not at Christ's door, but at his own. We know that nothing can be more in accordance with the will of Jesus, which is the will of God, than to deliver every man from sin, which is the opposite of His will. "How often would I . . . and ye would not!"

II. The story gives us next the Lord's answer. Mark narrates the actual miracle in very small compass, and dilates on the attitude and disposition of Jesus, as if apart from the supernatural element, that lovely picture was worth gazing upon, till our hearts were touched by its beauty, and drunk in its precious meaning. There is, first, the gush of spontaneous compassion. We owe the record of it to Mark alone. Jesus did not need to be moved to help by the sufferer's cry. The leprous lips were an appeal to His heart before any voice came,

hoarse and unnatural, from them. That compassion dwells for ever in Him, and moves Him, seated on the throne, as it did when in the humble house where He was teaching. Show Him misery, and He answers it with pity. That compassion is the true source of His work. He heals and helps, not because He is moved by prayers to an else unwonted tenderness, but because He has pity; and His whole work wells up from this deep fountain. Nor is it Jesus only whom we see in these wonderful words; for when we see Him, we see God, and that compassion is not only the revelation of a true brother's heart, but of a Father's pity. The Christian's God is no impassive Divinity, careless of mankind, but One who, "in His love and in His pity," redeems, and bears, and carries.

Christ's touch follows His compassion. The instinctive movement of pity was to thrust forth the hand to the sufferer. How precious that touch must have been to the poor wretch who, for all the period of his disease, had been isolated from men, and had never felt the pressure of a loving hand! Whatever deeper meanings we may see in that touch of Christ's, we must not lose sight of its beauty as spontaneous, uncalculated obedience to the instinct of pity. It may teach all would-be helpers the condition of succeeding in their efforts. If they

would heal lepers, they must take them by the hand. But note that this touch was either a deliberate putting aside of Mosaic regulations or a deliberate assumption of the priest's office. No Israelite but the priest could touch a leper without defilement. Whichever of the two it was, there is a claim of a very significant kind in the act. Jesus asserts His superiority to law, or His true sacerdotal character. He could touch pollution and be unpolluted. His hand could stroke the feculent ulcers and come away untainted. His cleansing is like that by sunshine, which is not defiled. He took on Him the likeness of the flesh of sin, and yet in Him is no sin.

Christ's word follows His touch. He shapes His verbal answer so as to correspond exactly to the prayer, thus showing us how tenderly He moulds His gifts to fit our faith. But what dignity and conscious power there are in that curt, authoritative, imperative "I will; be thou clean"! He accepts the ascription of power in His own will to heal. He does not say, as the king of Israel said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" And He professes to have power to act on material substances by the simple utterance of His will. Surely He who does this must be either guilty of unexampled arrogance or conscious of unexampled

power. Surely He who does it, and proves His right to do it, can be none other than the great power of God.

III. We have the immediate cure. Mark tells, with emphasis, how, "straightway," the leprosy departed. The healing of the leprosy of sin may be equally immediate. True, the process of conquering its dominion in the life is gradual and life-long ; but forgiveness may be the act of a moment, and so may the entrance into our tainted nature of that new life of God's spirit, which will grow to entire sanctification one day. The entrance of health may be instantaneous, though the operation of the new purity on the tainted nature is a work of time. There is no reason why the worst of men should not in one moment pass from death to life, and be healed of his plague. It is a bad sign when Christians begin to *sus*pect, and not to *ex*pect, immediate conversions.

If the leper is to be cleansed, he must make personal work of Christ's healing. It was of no use to him that showers of blessing had been falling. What he needed was that a rill of the great stream might flow to his lips. So we have to make individual application to the fountain of universal cleansing, and to appropriate for our own the wide-flowing mercy, "Thou canst make *me* clean."

We need not dwell on the consequences of the miracle. The charge to be silent, and to go to the priest, was for the man's sake, as well as for the sake of Christ's work. It was better for the healed leper to hold his tongue than to talk ; it was better for Christ's mission that the formal legal attestation of the reality of his cure should be obtained, than that irresponsible curiosity should have more materials for gossip. The man hurt himself, and hampered Christ's activity, by his disobedience. The excitement which he stimulated had already risen too high to be wholesome, and Christ could not use so turbid a stream to float His words upon. So, shunning and seeking to damp down the agitation, He betook Himself to the desert, and avoided the towns, teaching us a lesson of His method which we have much need to lay to heart.

LESSON IV

Christ's Authority to Forgive

ST. MARK ii. 1-12

1. "And again He entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that He was in the house.

2. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and He preached the word unto them.

3. And they come unto Him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

4. And when they could not come nigh unto Him for the press, they uncovered the roof where He was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

5. When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

6. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

7. Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

8. And immediately when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

9. Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

10. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (He saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11. I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

12. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion."

MARK alone gives Capernaum as the scene of this miracle. The excitement which had induced our Lord to leave that place had been allowed "some days" to quiet down, "after" which He ventures to

return, but does not seem to have sought publicity, but to have remained in "the house"—probably Peter's. There would be at least one woman's heart there, which would love to lavish grateful service on Him. But "He could not be hid," and, however little genuine or deep the eagerness might be, He will not refuse to meet it. Mark paints vividly the crowd flocking to the humble home, overflowing its modest capacity, blocking the doorway, and clustering round it outside as far as they could hear Christ's voice. "He was speaking the word to them," proclaiming His mission, as He had done in their synagogue, when He was interrupted by the events which follow, no doubt to the gratification of some of His hearers, who wanted something more exciting than "teaching."

I. We note the eager group of interrupters. Mark gives one of the minute touches which betray an eye-witness and a close observer when he tells us that the palsied man was carried by four friends—no doubt one at each corner of the bed, which would be some light framework, or even a mere quilt or mattress. The incident is told from the point of view of one sitting beside Jesus; they "come to Him," "cannot come near." The accurate specification of the process of removing the roof, which Matthew omits altogether, and

Luke tells much more vaguely, seems also to point to an eye-witness as the source of the narrative, who would, of course, be Peter, who well remembered all the steps of the unceremonious treatment of his property. His house was, probably, one of no great pretensions or size, but like hundreds of poor men's houses in Palestine still—a one-storied building, with a low, flat roof, mostly earth, and easily reached from the ground by some outside stair. It would be somewhat difficult to get a sick man and his bed up there, however low, and somewhat free-and-easy dealing with another man's house to burrow through the roof a hole big enough for the purpose; but there is no impossibility, and the difficulty is part of the lesson of the incident, and is recognised expressly in the narrative by Christ's notice of their "faith." We can fancy the blank looks of the four bearers, and the disappointment on the sick man's thin face and weary eyes, as they got to the edge of the crowd, and saw that there was no hope of forcing a passage. Had they been less certain of a cure, and less eager, they would have shouldered their burden and carried him home again. They could well have pleaded sufficient reason for giving up the attempt. But "we cannot" is the coward's word. "We must" is the earnest man's. If we have any real consciousness of

our need to get to Christ, and any real wish to do so, it is not a crowd round the door that will keep us back. Difficulties test, and therefore increase, faith. They develop a sanctified ingenuity in getting over them, and bring a rich harvest of satisfaction when at last conquered. These four eager faces looked down through the broken roof, when they had succeeded in dropping the bed right at Christ's feet, with a far keener pleasure than if they had just carried him in by the door. No doubt their act was inconvenient; for, however light the roofing, some rubbish must have come down on the heads of some of the notabilities below. And, no doubt, it was interfering with property as well as with propriety. But here was a sick man, and there was his Healer; and it was their business to get the two together somehow. It was worth risking a good deal to accomplish. The rabbis sitting there might frown at rude intrusiveness; Peter might object to the damage to his roof; some of the listeners might dislike the interruption to His teaching; but Jesus read the action of the bearers and the consent of the motionless figure on the couch as the indication of "their faith," and His love and power responded to its call.

II. Note the unexpected gift with which Christ answers this faith. None of them speak a word throughout the

whole incident. The act of the bearers and the condition of the sick man spoke loudly enough. Obviously, all five must have had, at all events, so much "faith" as went to the conviction that He could and would heal; and this faith is the occasion of Christ's gift. The bearers had it, as is shown by their work. It was a visible faith, manifest by conduct. He can see the hidden heart; but here He looks upon conduct, and thence infers disposition. Faith, if worth anything, comes to the surface in act. Was it the faith of the bearers, or of the sick man, which Christ rewarded? Both. As Abraham's intercession delivered Lot, as Paul in the shipwreck was the occasion of safety to all the crew, so one man's faith may bring blessings on another. But if the sick man had not had faith too, he would not have let himself be brought at all, and would certainly not have consented to reach Christ's presence by so strange and, to him, dangerous a way—painfully hoisted up some narrow stair, and then perilously let down, at the risk of cords snapping, or hands letting go, or quilts tearing. His faith, apparently, was deeper than theirs; for Christ's answer, though it went far beyond his or their expectations, must have been moulded to meet his deepest sense of need. We mark it in the tender greeting "son," or, as the margin has it, "child"—

possibly pointing to the man's youth, but more probably an appellation revealing the mingled love and dignity of Jesus, and taking this man into the arms of His tenderness. The palsy may have been the consequence of "fast" living; but, whether it were so or no, Christ saw that in the dreary hours of solitary inaction to which it had condemned the sufferer, remorse had been busy gnawing at his heart, and that pain had done its best work by leading to penitence. Therefore He spoke to the conscience before He touched the bodily ailment, and met the sufferer's deepest and most deeply felt disease first. He goes to the bottom of the malady with His cure. These great words are not only closely adapted to the one case before Him, but contain a general truth, worthy to be pondered by all philanthropists. It is of little use to cure symptoms unless you cure diseases. The tap-root of all misery is sin; and, until it is grubbed up, hacking at the branches is sad waste of time. Cure sin, and you make the heart a temple and the world a paradise. We Christians should hail all efforts of every sort for making men nobler, happier, better physically, morally, intellectually; but let us not forget that there is but one effectual cure for the world's misery, and that is wrought by Him who has borne the world's sins.

III. Note the snarl of the scribes. "Certain of the scribes," says Mark—not being much impressed by their dignity, which, as Luke tells us, was considerable. He says that they were "Pharisees and doctors of the law . . . out of every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem" itself, who had come on a formal errand of investigation. Their tempers would not be improved by the tearing up of the roof, nor sweetened by seeing the "popularity" of this doubtful young Teacher, who showed that He had the secret, which they had not, of winning men's hearts. Nobody came crowding to them, nor hung on their lips. Professional jealousy has often a great deal to do in helping zeal for truth to sniff out heresy. The whispered cavillings are graphically represented. The scribes would not speak out, like men, and call on Jesus to defend His words. If they had been sure of their ground, they should have boldly charged Him with blasphemy; but perhaps they were half suspicious that He could show good cause for His speech. Perhaps they were afraid to oppose the tide of enthusiasm for Him. So they content themselves with comparing notes among themselves, and wait for Him to entangle Himself a little more in their nets. They affect to despise Him. "This man" is meant for contempt. If He were so poor a creature, why were

they there, all the way from Jerusalem, some of them? They overdo their part. The short, snarling sentences of their muttered objections, as given in the Revised Version, may be taken as shared among three speakers, each bringing his quota of bitterness. One says, "Why doth" He "thus speak"? Another curtly answers, "He blasphemeth;" While a third formally states the great truth on which they rest their indictment. Their principle is impregnable. Forgiveness is a Divine prerogative, to be shared by none, to be grasped by none, without, in the act, diminishing God's glory. But it is not enough to have one premise of your syllogism right. Only God forgives sins; and if this man says that He does, He, no doubt, claims to be, in some sense, God. But whether He "blasphemeth" or no depends on what the scribes do not stay to ask; namely, whether He has the right so to claim: and, if He has, it is they, not He, who are the blasphemers. We need not wonder that they recoiled from the right conclusion, which is the Divinity of Jesus. Their fault was not their jealousy for the Divine honour, but their inattention to Christ's evidence in support of His claims, which inattention had its roots in their moral condition, their self-sufficiency, and absorption in trivialities of externalism. But we have to thank them for clearly discerning and bluntly

stating what was involved in our Lord's claims, and for thus bringing up the sharp issue—blasphemer, or God manifest in the flesh.

IV. Note our Lord's answer to the cavils. Mark would have us see something supernatural in the swiftness of Christ's knowledge of the muttered criticisms. He perceived it "straightway" and "in His Spirit," which is tantamount to saying by Divine discernment, and not by the medium of sense, as we do. His spirit was a mirror, in which looking He saw externals. In the most literal and deepest sense, He does "not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears."

The absence from our Lord's answer of any explanation that He was only declaring the Divine forgiveness and not Himself exercising a Divine prerogative, shuts us up to the conclusion that He desired to be understood as exercising it. Unless His pardon is something quite different from the ministerial announcement of forgiveness, which His servants are empowered to make to penitents, He wilfully led the cavillers into error. His answer starts with a counter-question—another "why" to meet their "why." It then puts into words what they were thinking; namely, that it was easy to assume a power the reality of which could not be tested.

To say "Thy sins be forgiven," and to say "Take up thy bed," are equally easy. To effect either is equally beyond man's power; but the one can be verified and the other cannot, and, no doubt, some of the scribes were maliciously saying: "It is all very well to pretend to do what cannot be tested. Let Him come out into daylight, and do a miracle which we can see." He is quite willing to accept the challenge to test His power in the invisible realm of conscience by His power in the visible region. The remarkable construction of the long sentence in verses 10 and 11, which is almost verbally identical in the three Gospels, parenthesis and all, sets the suddenness of the turn from the scribes to the patient before us with dramatic force. Mark that our Lord claims "authority" to forgive, the same word which has been twice in the people's mouths in reference to His teaching and to His sway over demons. It implies not only power, but rightful power, and that authority He wields as "Son of man" and "on earth." This is the first use of that title in Mark. It is Christ's own designation of Himself, never found on other lips except the dying Stephen's. It implies His Messianic office, and points back to Daniel's great prophecy; but it also asserts His true manhood and His unique relation to humanity, as being Himself its sum and perfection,

—not *a*, but *the*, Son of man. Now the wonder which He would confirm by His miracle is that such a manhood, walking on earth, has lodged in it the Divine prerogative. He who is the Son of man must be something more than man, even the Son of God. His power to forgive is both derived and inherent, but, in either aspect, is entirely different from the human office of announcing God's forgiveness.

For once, Christ seems to work a miracle in response to unbelief, rather than to faith. But the real occasion of it was not the cavils of the scribes, but the faith and need of the man and His friends; while the silencing of unbelief, and the enlightenment of honest doubt, was but a collateral benefit.

V. Note the cure and its effect. This is another of the miracles in which no vehicle of the healing power is employed. The word is enough; but here the word is spoken, not as to the disease, but to the sufferer; and in his obedience he receives strength to obey. Tell a palsied man to rise and walk! His disease is that he cannot. But if he believes that Christ has power to heal, he will try to do as he is bid; and, as he tries, the paralysis steals out of the long-unused limbs. Jesus makes us able to do what He bids us do. The condition of healing is faith, and the test of faith is obedience.

We do not get strength till we put ourselves into the attitude of obedience. The cure was immediate; and the cured man, who was "borne of four" into the healing presence, walked away, with his bed under his arm, "before them all." They were ready enough to make way for him then. And what said the wise doctors to it all? We do not hear that any of them were convinced. And what said the people? They were "amazed," and they "glorified God," and recognised that they had seen something quite new. That was all. Their glorifying God cannot have been very deep-seated, or they would have better learned the lesson of the miracle. Amazement was but a poor result. No emotion is more transient or less fruitful than gaping astonishment; and that, with a little varnish of acknowledgment of God's power, which led to nothing, was all the fruit of Christ's mighty work. Let us hope that the healed man carried his unseen blessing in a faithful and grateful heart, and consecrated his restored strength to the Lord who healed him!

LESSON V

Christ's Sad Insight into the Fate of His Words

St. Mark iv 10–20

10. "And when He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked of Him the parable.

11. And He said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:

12. That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

13. And He said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

14. The sower soweth the word.

15. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

16. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

17. And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

18. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

19. And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

20. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred."

DEAN STANLEY and others have pointed out how the natural features of the land round the lake of Gennesaret are reflected in the parable of the

sower. But we must go deeper than that to find its occasion. It was not because Jesus may have seen a sower in a field which had these three varieties of soil that He spoke, but because He saw the frivolous crowd gathered to hear His words. The sad, grave description of the threefold kinds of vainly-sown ground is the transcript of His clear and sorrowful insight into the real worth of the enthusiasm of the eager listeners on the beach. He was under no illusions about it; and, in this parable, He seeks to warn His disciples against expecting much from it, and to bring its subjects to a soberer estimate of what His word required of them. The full force and pathos of the parable is felt only when it is regarded as the expression of our Lord's keen consciousness of His wasted words. Our lesson falls into two parts—the explanation of the reasons for His use of parables, and the interpretation of the parable itself.

I. Christ was the centre of three circles: the outermost consisting of the fluctuating masses of merely curious hearers; the second, of true but somewhat loosely-attached disciples, whom Mark here calls "they that were about Him;" and the innermost, the twelve. The two latter appear, in our first verse, as asking farther instruction of "the parables," a phrase which

includes both parts of Christ's answer. The statement of His reason for the use of parables is startling. It sounds as if those who needed light most were to get least of it, and as if the parabolic form was deliberately adopted for the express purpose of hiding the truth. No wonder that men have shrunk from such a thought, and tried to soften down the terrible words. Inasmuch as a parable is the presentation of some spiritual truth under the guise of an incident belonging to the material sphere, it follows, from its very nature, that it may either reveal or hide the truth, and that it will do the former to susceptible and the latter to unsusceptible souls. The eye may either dwell upon the coloured glass or on the light that streams through it; and, as is the case with all revelations of spiritual realities through sensuous mediums, gross and earthly hearts will not rise above the medium, which to them, by their own fault, becomes a medium of obscuration, not of revelation. This double aspect belongs to all revelation, which is both a savour of life unto life and of death unto death. It is most conspicuous in the parable, which careless listeners may take for a mere story, and which those who feel and see more deeply will apprehend in its depth. These twofold effects are certain, and must therefore be embraced in Christ's purpose: for we cannot suppose that

issues of His teaching escaped His foresight; and all must be regarded as part of His design. But may we not draw a distinction between design and desire? The primary purpose of all revelation is to reveal. If the only intention were to hide, silence would secure that, and the parable were needless. But if the twofold operation is intended, we can understand how mercy and righteous retribution both preside over the use of parables; and how the thin veil hides that it may reveal; and how the very obscurity may draw some grosser souls to a longer gaze, and so may lead to a perception of the the truth, which, in its purer form, they are neither worthy nor capable of receiving. No doubt, our Lord here announces a very solemn law, which runs through all the Divine dealings, "To him that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath."

II. We turn to the exposition of the parable of the sower, or rather of the fourfold soils in which he sows the seed. A sentence at the beginning disposes of the personality of the sower, which, in Mark's version, does not refer exclusively to Christ, but includes all who carry the word to men. The emblem of seed for the word needs no explanation. The tiny, living nucleus of force, which is thrown broadcast, and must sink under-

ground in order to grow, which does grow, and comes to light again in a form which fills the whole field where it is sown, and nourishes life as well as supplies material for another sowing, is the truest symbol of the truth in its working on the spirit. The threefold causes of failure are arranged in progressive order. At every stage of growth there are enemies. The first sort never gets into the ground at all; the second grows a little, but its greenness soon withers; the third has longer life, and a yet sadder failure, because a nearer approach to fertility. The types of character represented are unreceptive carelessness, emotional facility of acceptance, and earthly-mindedness, scotched, but not killed, by the word. · The dangers which assault, but too successfully, the seed are the personal activity of Satan, opposition from without, and conflicting desires within. On all the soils the seed has been sown; for drills are modern inventions; and sowing broadcast is the only right husbandry in Christ's field with Christ's seed. He is a poor workman, and an unfaithful one, who wants to pick his ground. Sow everywhere. "Thou canst not tell which shall prosper, whether this or that." The character of the soil is not irrevocably fixed; but the trodden path may be broken up to softness, and the stony heart changed, and the soul filled with cares, and

lusts be cleared, and any soil may become good ground. So the seed is to be flung out broadcast; and prayer for seed and soil will often turn the weeping sower into the joyous reaper.

The seed sown on the trodden footpath running across the field never gets beyond the surface. It lies there, and has no real contact, nor any chance of growth. It must be in, not on the ground, if its mysterious power is to be put forth. A pebble is as likely to grow as a seed, if both lie side by side, on the surface. Is not this the description of a mournfully large proportion of hearers of God's truth? It never gets deeper than their ears, or, at the most, effects a shallow lodgment on the surface of their minds. So many feet pass along the path, and beat it into hardness, that the truth has no chance to take root. Habitual indifference to the gospel, masked by an utterly unmeaning and unreal acceptance of it, and by equally habitual decorous attendance on its preaching, is the condition of a dreadfully large proportion of church-goers. Their very familiarity with the truth robs it of all penetrating power. They know all about it, as they suppose; and so they listen to it as they would to the clank of a mill-wheel to which they were accustomed, missing its noise if it stops, and liking to be sent to sleep by its hum. Familiar truth often

lies "bedridden in the dormitory of the soul, beside exploded errors."

And what comes of this idle hearing, without acceptance or obedience? Truth which is common, and which a man supposes himself to believe, without having ever reflected on it, or let it influence conduct, is sure to die out. If we do not turn our beliefs into practice they will not long be our beliefs. Neglected impressions fade; the seed is only safe when it is buried. There are flocks of hungry, sharp-eyed, quick-flying thieves ready to pounce down on every exposed grain. So Mark uses here again his favourite "straightway" to express the swift disappearance of the seed. As soon as the preacher's voice is silent, or the book closed, the words are forgotten. The impression of a passing keel on a smooth lake is not more evanescent.

The distinct reference to Satan as the agent in removing the seed is not to be passed by lightly. Christ's words about demons have been emptied of meaning by the allegation that He was only accommodating Himself to the superstition of the times, but no explanation of that sort will do in this case. He surely commits Himself here to the assertion of the existence and agency of Satan; and surely those who profess to receive His words as the truth ought not to make light

of them, in reference to so solemn and awe-inspiring a revelation.

The seed gets rather farther on the road to fruit in the second case. A thin surface of mould above a shelf of rock is like a forcing-house in hot countries. The stone keeps the heat and stimulates growth. The very thing that prevents deep rooting facilitates rapid shooting. The green spikelets will be above ground there long before they show in deeper soil. There would be many such hearers in the "very great multitude" on the shore, who were attracted, they scarcely knew why, and were the more enthusiastic the less they understood the real scope of Christ's teaching. The disciple who pressed forward with his excited and unasked "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!" was one of such—well-meaning, perfectly sincere, warmly affected, and completely unreliable. Lightly come is lightly go. When such people forsake their fervent purposes, and turn their backs on what they have been so eagerly pursuing they are quite consistent; for they are obeying the uppermost impulse in both cases, and, as they were easily drawn to follow, without consideration, they are easily driven back with as little. The first taste of supposed good secured their giddy-pated adhesion; the first taste of trouble ensures their desertion. They are the

same men acting in the same fashion at both times. Two things are marked by our Lord as suspicious in such easily-won discipleship—its suddenness and its joyfulness. Feelings which are so easily stirred are superficial. A puff of wind sets a shallow pond in wavelets. Quick maturity means brief life and swift decay, as every revival shows. The more earnestly we believe in the possibility of sudden conversions, the more we should remember this warning, and make sure that, if they are sudden, they shall be thorough, which they may be. The swiftness is not so suspicious if it be not accompanied with the other doubtful characteristic —namely, immediate joy. Joy is the result of true acceptance of the gospel; but not the first result. Without consciousness of sin and apprehension of judgment there is no conversion. We lay down no rules as to depth or duration of the "godly sorrow" which precedes all well-grounded "joy in the Lord;" but the Christianity which has taken a flying leap over the valley of humiliation will scarcely reach a firm standing on the rock. He who "straightway with joy" receives the word, will straightway, with equal precipitation, cast it away when the difficulties and oppositions which meet all true discipleship begin to develop themselves. Fair-weather crews like these will desert when storms begin to blow.

The third sort of soil brings things still farther on before failure comes. The seed is not only covered and germinating, but has actually begun to be fruitful. The thorns are supposed to have been cut down, but their roots have been left, and they grow faster than the wheat. They take the "goodness" out of the ground, and block out sun and air; and so the stalks, which promised well, begin to get pale and droop, and the half-formed ear comes to nothing, or, as the other version of the parable has it, brings "forth no fruit to perfection." There are two crops fighting for the upper hand on the one ground, and the earlier possessor wins. The "struggle for existence" ends with the "survival of the fittest"; that is, of the worst, to which the natural bent of the desires and inclinations of the unrenewed man is more congenial. The "cares of this world" and the "deceitfulness of riches" are but two sides of one thing. The poor man has cares; the rich man has the illusions of his wealth. Both men agree in thinking that this world's good is most desirable. The one is anxious because he has not enough of it, or fears to lose what he has; the other man is full of foolish confidence because he has much. Eager desires after creatural good are common to both; and, what with the anxiety lest they lose, and the self-satisfaction because they

have, and the mouths watering for the world's good, there is no force of will, nor warmth of love, nor clearness of vision, left for better things. That is the history of the fall of many a professing Christian, who never apostatises, and keeps up a reputable appearance of godliness to the end; but the old worldliness, which was cut down for a while, has sprung again in his heart and, by slow degrees, the word is "choked"—a most expressive picture of the silent, gradual dying-out of its power for want of sun and air—and "he" or "it becometh unfruitful," relapsing from a previous condition of fruit-bearing into sterility. No heart can mature two crops. We must choose between God and Mammon—between the word and the world.

There is nothing fixed or necessary in the faults of these three classes, and they are not so much the characteristics of separate types of men as evils common to all hearers, against which all have to guard. They depend upon the will and affections much more than on anything fixed and not to be got rid of in temperament. So there is no reason why any one of the three should not become "good soil;" and it is to be noted that the characteristic of that soil is simply that it receives and grows the seed. Any heart that will, can do that; and that is all that is needed. But to do it, there will have

to be diligent care, lest we fall into any of the evils pointed at in the preceding parts of the parable, which are ever waiting to entrap us. The true "accepting" of the word requires that we shall not let it lie on the surface of our minds, as in the case of the first; nor be satisfied with its penetrating a little deeper and striking root in our emotions, like the second, of whom it is said with such profound truth, that they "have no root in themselves," their roots being only in the superficial part of their being, and never going down to the true central self; nor let competing desires grow up unchecked, like the third; but cherish the "word of the truth of the gospel" in our deepest hearts, guard it against foes, let it rule there, and mould all our conduct in conformity with its blessed principles. The true Christian is he who can truly say, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart." If we do, *we* shall be fruitful, because *it* will bear fruit in us. No man is obliged, by temperament or circumstances, to be wayside, or stony, or thorny ground. Wherever a heart opens to receive the gospel, and keeps it fast, there the increase will be realised—not in equal measure in all, but in each according to faithfulness and diligence. Mark arranges the various yields in ascending scale, as if to teach our hopes and aims a growing largeness, while Matthew orders them in the

opposite fashion, as if to teach that, while the hundredfold, which is possible for all, is best, the smaller yield is accepted by the great Lord of the harvest, who Himself not only sows the seed, but gives it its vitality, blesses its springing, and rejoices to gather the wheat into His barn.

LESSON VI

The Lord of Demons

St. Mark v. 1-20

1. "And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

2. And when He was come out of the ship, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

3. Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

4. Because that He had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

5. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped Him.

7. And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure Thee by God, that Thou torment me not.

8. For He said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

9. And He asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion; for we are many.

10. And he besought Him much that He would not send them away out of the country.

11. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

12. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

13. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

14. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.

15. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the

legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

16. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.

17. And they began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts.

18. And when He was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed Him that he might be with Him.

19. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

20. And He departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel."

THE awful picture of this demoniac is either painted from life, or it is one of the most wonderful feats of the poetic imagination. Nothing more terrible, vivid, penetrating, and real was ever conceived by the greatest creative genius. If it is not simply a portrait, Æschylus or Dante might own the artist for a brother. We see the quiet landing on the eastern shore, and almost hear the yells that broke the silence as the fierce, demon-ridden man hurried to meet them, perhaps with hostile purpose. The dreadful characteristics of his state are sharply and profoundly signalised. He lives up in the rock-hewn tombs which overhang the beach; for all which belongs to corruption and death is congenial to the subjects of that dark kingdom of evil. He has superhuman strength, and has known no gentle efforts to reclaim, but only savage attempts to "tame" by force, as if he were a beast. Fetters and manacles have been snapped like

rushes by him. Restless, sleepless, hating men, he has made the night hideous with his wild shrieks, and fled, swift as the wind, from place to place among the lonely hills. Insensible to pain, and deriving some dreadful satisfaction from his own wounds, he has gashed himself with splinters of rock, and howled, in a delirium of pain and pleasure, at the sight of his own blood. His sharpened eyesight sees Jesus from afar, and, with the disordered haste and preternatural agility which marked all his movements, he runs towards Him. Such is the introduction to the narrative of the cure. It paints for us not merely a maniac, but a demoniac. He is not a man at war with himself, but a man at war with other beings, who have forced themselves into his house of life. At least, so says Mark, and so said Jesus; and if the story before us is true, its subsequent incidents compel the acceptance of that explanation. What went into the herd of swine?

The narrative of the restoration of the sufferer has a remarkable feature, which may help to mark off its stages. The word "besought" occurs four times in it, and we may group the details round each instance.

I. The demons beseeching Jesus through the man's voice. He was, in the exact sense of the word, *distracted* —drawn two ways. For it would seem to have been the

self in him that ran to Jesus and fell at His feet, as if in some dim hope of rescue; but it is the demons in him that speak, though the voice be his. They force him to utter their wishes, their terrors, their loathing of Christ, though he says "I" and "me," as if these were his own. That horrible condition of a double, or, as in this case, a manifold personality, speaking through human organs, and overwhelming the proper self, mysterious as it is, is the very essence of the awful misery of the demoniacs. Unless we are resolved to force meanings of our own on Scripture, I do not see how we can avoid recognising this. What black thoughts, seething with all rebellious agitation, the reluctant lips have to utter! The self-drawn picture of the demoniac nature is as vivid, and more repellant, than the evangelist's terrible portrait of the outward man. Whatever dumb yearning after Jesus may have been in the oppressed human consciousness, his words are a shriek of terror and recoil. The mere presence of Christ lashes the demons into paroxysms; but, before the man spoke, Christ had spoken His stern command to come forth. He is answered by this howl of fear and hate. Clear recognition of Christ's person is in it, and not difficult to explain, if we believe that others than the sufferer looked through his wild eyes, and spoke in his loud cry. They know

Him who had conquered their prince long ago; if the existence of fallen spirits be admitted, their knowledge is no difficulty. The next element in the words is hatred, as fixed as the knowledge is clear. God's supremacy and loftiness, and Christ's nature, are recognised, but only the more abhorred. The name of God can be used as a spell to sway Jesus, but it has no power to touch this fierce hatred into submission. "The devils—also believe and tremble." This, then, is a dark possibility, which has become actual for real living beings, that they should know God, and hate as heartily as they know clearly. That is the terminus towards which human spirits may be travelling. Christ's power is recognised too, and His mere presence makes the flock of obscene creatures nested in the man uneasy, like bats in a cave, who flutter against a light. They shrink from him, and shudderingly renounce all connection with him, as if their cries would alter facts, or make him relax his grip. The very words of the question prove its folly. "What is there to me and thee?" implies that there were two parties to the answer; and the writhings of one of them could not break the bond. To all this is to be added that the "torment" deprecated was the expulsion from the man, as if there were some grim satisfaction and dreadful alleviation in

being there, rather than "in the abyss"—as Luke gives it—which appears to be the alternative. If we put all these things together, we get an awful glimpse into the secrets of that dark realm, which it is better to ponder with awe than flippantly to deny or mock.

How striking is Christ's unmoved calm in the face of all this fury! He is always laconic in dealing with demoniacs; and, no doubt, His tranquil presence helped to calm the man, however it excited the demon. The distinct intention of the question, "What is thy name?" is to rouse the man's self-consciousness, and make him feel his separate existence, apart from the alien tyranny which had just been using his voice and usurping his personality. He had said "I" and me." Christ meets him with, Who is the "I"? and the very effort to answer would facilitate the deliverance. But for the moment the foreign influence is still too strong, and the answer, than which there is nothing more weird and awful in the whole range of literature, comes. "My name is Legion; for we are many." Note the momentary gleam of the true self in the first word or two, fading away into the old confusion. He begins with "my," but he drops back to "we." Note the pathetic force of the name. This poor wretch had seen the solid mass of the Roman legion, the instrument by which foreign

tyrants crushed the nations. He felt himself oppressed and conquered by their multitudinous array. The voice of the "legion," has a kind of cruel ring of triumph, as if spoken as much to terrify the victim as to answer the question.

Again the man's voice speaks, beseeching the direct opposite of what he really would have desired. He was not so much in love with his dreadful tenants as to pray against their expulsion, but their fell power coerces his lips, and he asks for what would be his ruin. That prayer, clean contrary to the man's only hope, is surely the climax of the horror. In a less degree, we also too often deprecate the stroke which delivers, and would fain keep the legion of evils which riot within

II. The demons beseeching Jesus without disguise. There seems to be intended a distinction between "he besought," in verse 10, and "they besought," in verse 12. Whether we are to suppose that, in the latter case, the man's voice was used or no, the second request was more plainly not his, but theirs. It looks as if, somehow, the command was already beginning to take effect, and "he" and "they" were less closely intertwined, It is easy to ridicule this part of the incident, and as easy to say that it is incredible; but it is wiser to remem-

ber the narrow bounds of our knowledge of the unseen world of being, and to be cautious in asserting that there is nothing beyond the horizon but vacuity. If there be unclean spirits, we know too little about them to say what is possible. Only this is plain—that the difficulty of supposing them to inhabit swine is less, if there be any difference, than of supposing them to inhabit men, since the animal nature, especially of such an animal, would correspond to their impurity, and be open to their driving. The house and the tenant are well matched. But why should the expelled demons seek such an abode? It would appear that anywhere was better than "the abyss," and that unless they could find some body to enter, thither they must go. It would seem, too, that there was no other land open to them—for the prayer on the man's lips had been not to send them "out of the country," as if that was the only country on earth open to them. That makes for the opinion that demoniacal possession was the dark shadow which attended, for reasons not discoverable by us, the light of Christ's coming, and was limited in time and space by His earthly manifestation. But on such matters there is not ground enough for certainty. Another difficulty has been raised as to Christ's right to destroy property. It was very questionable property, if the owners were

Jews. Jesus owns all things, and has the right and the power to use them as He will; and if the purposes served by the destruction of animal life or property are beneficent and lofty, it leaves no blot on His goodness. He used His miraculous power twice for destruction—once on a fig-tree, once on a herd of swine. In both cases, the good sought was worth the loss. Whether was it better that the herd should live and fatten, or that a man should be delivered, and that he and they who saw should be assured of his deliverance and of Christ's power? "Is not a man much better than a sheep," and much more than a pig? They are born to be killed, and nobody cries out cruelty. Why should not Christ have sanctioned this slaughter, if it helped to steady the poor man's nerves, or to establish the reality of possession and of his deliverance? Notice that the drowning of the herd does not appear to have entered into the calculations of the unclean spirits. They desired houses to live in after their expulsion, and for them to plunge the swine into the lake would have defeated their purpose. The stampede was an unexpected effect of the commingling of the demonic with the animal nature, and outwitted the demons. "The devil is an ass." There is a lower depth than the animal nature; and even swine feel uncomfortable when the demon is

in them, and in their panic rush anywhere to get rid of the incubus, and, before they know, find themselves struggling in the lake. "Which things are an allegory."

III. The terrified Gerasenes beseeching Jesus to leave them. They had rather have their swine than their Saviour, and so, though they saw the demoniac sitting, clothed, and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus, they in turn beseech that He should take Himself away. Fear and selfishness prompted the prayer. The communities on the eastern side of the lake were largely Gentile; and, no doubt, these people knew that they did many worse things than swine-keeping, and may have been afraid that some more of their wealth would have to go the same road as the herd. They did not want instruction, nor feel that they needed a healer. Were their prayers so very unlike the wishes of many of us? Is there nobody nowadays unwilling to let the thought of Christ into his life, because he feels an uneasy suspicion that, if Christ comes, a good deal will have to go? How many trades and schemes of life really beseech Jesus to go away and leave them in peace!

And He goes away. The tragedy of life is that we have the awful power of severing ourselves from His influence. Christ commands unclean spirits, but He

can only plead with hearts. And if we bid Him depart, He is fain to leave us for the time to the indulgence of our foolish and wicked schemes. If any man open, He comes in—oh, how gladly! but if any man slam the door in His face, He can but tarry without and knock. Sometimes His withdrawing does more than His loudest knocking; and sometimes they who repelled Him as He stood on the beach call Him back, as He moves away to the boat. It is in the hope that they may, that He goes.

IV. The restored man's beseeching to abide with Christ. No wonder that the spirit of this man, all tremulous with the conflict, and scarcely able yet to realise his deliverance, clung to Christ, and besought Him to let him continue by His side. Conscious weakness, dread of some recurrence of the inward hell, and grateful love, prompted the prayer. The prayer itself was partly right and partly wrong. Right, in clinging to Jesus as the only refuge from the past misery; wrong, in clinging to His visible presence as the only way of keeping near Him. Therefore, He who had permitted the wish of the demons, and complied with the entreaties of the terrified mob, did *not* yield to the prayer, throbbing with love and conscious weakness. Strange that Jesus should put aside a hand that sought to grasp His in

order to be safe; but His refusal was, as always, the gift of something better, and He ever disappoints the wish in order more truly to satisfy the need. The best defence against the return of the evil spirits was in occupation. It is the "empty" house which invites them back. Nothing was so likely to confirm and steady the convalescent mind as to dwell on the fact of his deliverance. Therefore he is sent to proclaim it among friends who had known his dreadful state, and old associations which would help him to knit his new life to his old, and to treat his misery as a parenthesis. Jesus commanded silence or speech according to the need of the subjects of His miracles. For some, silence was best, to deepen the impression of blessing received; for others, speech was best, to engage and so to fortify the mind against relapse.

LESSON VII

Christ Answering and Educating Imperfect Faith

St. Mark v. 25-34

25. "And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,

26. And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.

27. When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched His garment.

28. For she said, If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole.

29. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

30. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned Him about in the press, and said, Who touched My clothes?

31. And His disciples said unto Him, Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?

32. And He looked round about to see her that had done this thing.

33. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth.

34. And He said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

JESUS never needs to make haste. Jairus daughter is "lying at the point of death," and her father must have sorely grudged every moment spent on this woman; but Christ can afford to let the one sufferer die while He heals the other. The gain of one is not the loss of another, for His resources are infinite. So

His pause on the road to so pressing a case is eloquent of His calm assurance of power, and of room in His heart for every one. The story gives us three stages, all bearing on the power of an imperfect faith and our Lord's treatment of it.

I. We have the picture of a genuine though very imperfect faith (verses 25-28). The woman is a poor, shrinking creature, broken down by her long illness, depressed by the failure of all attempts at cure, and crushed by poverty, to which her doctors had brought her. She does not venture to speak to Jesus, but lets Him pass before she can come near Him, and then creeps up in the crowd behind, and puts out her wasted, trembling hand, through some opening wide enough to let these transparent fingers pass, believing that the touch will heal. It was very ignorant faith. She dimly believes that, somehow or other, this miracle-working rabbi will heal her; but the cure is to be a piece of magic, secured by material contact of finger and robe. Christ's knowledge, or will, or pity and love, are not thought of as concerned. She thinks that she can filch a cure from Him, and steal away, leaving Him none the wiser nor the poorer. It is easy to say, "What blank ignorance of Christ's character and way of working! What gross superstition!" Yes; so it is. But is there

nothing nobler visible in the act? Is there not a hunger for His healing, and an absolute assurance that one finger-tip on His robe is enough? And is not that the saving element which neutralises all the folly and ignorance? There may be a real faith in Jesus Christ, though there be a very hazy apprehension of Him, and of His work, and of the manner in which His blessings come. Of course, every defect in clear and true conceptions of Him and it reacts injuriously on a man, and robs him of the blessings which flow from believing the truth. But the vitality and power of faith are not measured by the clearness and accuracy of belief. A strong and living faith may be based upon very imperfect intellectual perception of very partial truth. Feeling how short a distance our eyesight travels, and how little, after all our systems, the bulk of men in Christian countries know lucidly of theological truth, and how wide are our differences of opinion, and how soon we all come to the boundaries, it ought to be joy to know that Christ accepts ignorant faith. If we know thus much—that we are sick hopelessly unless He help and heal, and that He will heal—and if our faith builds upon that knowledge, then we shall be made whole.

The woman's particular error was like that of those who attach importance to sacraments as channels of

grace, and in whose systems the hem of the garment and the touch of the finger are apt to be put in the place of the heart of the wearer of the robe, and the grasp of faith on Himself. There is much in the set of opinion at present which tends to the revival of fullblown sacramentarian doctrines. Puritanism is unfashionable in these æsthetic and High-Church days. We may regret this; but the more we are called on to resist the teachings of a system which has the most disastrous effect on the whole conception of the gospel and way of salvation, the more we should be careful to remember that, side by side with it, there may be, and often has been, a true faith, and that the clinging trust with which many of its disciples have held to Jesus, and the passion of love to Him which has animated them, may put to shame the cold and wavering faith of the believers in a purer gospel.

This woman's faith was selfish. She wanted healing; she did not want anything more to do with Jesus. She felt little gratitude to Him, for she thought that she had stolen, not that He had given, the blessing. Is not this like what often marks the early stages of our faith? At first we are often driven rather than drawn to Jesus by the consciousness of need. The soul, absorbed in its own misery, sees from afar a great light, and

stumbles toward it. Its first desire is forgiveness and deliverance. The uppermost motive in the earliest stages of faith is generally self-regard. That is all right. The most "selfish" wish to escape from hell may be the beginning of a trust which lifts the soul to sublimities of self-denial, and makes death itself sweet for His dear love's sake. The starting-point may be "Save, Lord, or I perish;" but the goal is, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

This woman's faith was real, though marred by distrust. She has not full reliance on Christ's love. She dare not appeal to Him, but dreads His notice, and lets Him pass before she puts out her hand. Cross-currents agitate her. She doubts, yet believes. She is afraid, and bold. She will fling herself on His power, but she durst not invoke His pity. So is it ever with our faith. It should be unbroken, continuous, undimmed by any speck of doubt. But the actuality is far different. We are often tempted to question the reality of our faith, because we are so sure of the reality of our unbelief and disbelief. But that is wrong. There may be a centre of trust, with a nebulous surrounding of doubt. There may be a germ, infinitesimal, yet living, and destined to become a great tree. Where is it written that faith must be perfect or else false? This

story teaches us the very opposite. And whoever is conscious of the imperfection of a feeble, ignorant, selfish faith, should tighten, not slacken, his grasp of Christ, and be sure that the old prayer is never offered in vain, if offered, as at first, with tears. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

II. We have Christ's answer to imperfect faith. Mark again uses his favourite "straightway" in describing the cure. The finger on the robe brings immediate consciousness of a change; and the glad sense of health, to which, for twelve long years, she had been a stranger, springs up within her again. As we know, it was not the garment, but the Wearer, who cured; and the means of contact between the Healer and the sufferer was not the finger, but the faith. There was no real connection between touching His robe and being cured; but the poor woman thought that there was, and therefore Christ stoops to her childish thought, and allows her to prescribe the path by which His gift shall reach her. He does not say to her, "You must understand better, and put away this foolish notion of yours, or else I cannot heal you;" but He says by His act, "If you think that you are healed through your finger on the garment's hem, then through your finger on the hem you shall be cured. According to thy faith, be it unto thee."

That is always His way. As we shall see, He will not leave the imperfection of faith undisclosed, or uninstructed; but these lessons come after the answer. It must be rewarded first, and disciplined second. For it cannot be disciplined till it has been rewarded. Our faith largely determines the measure and the manner of Christ's gift. He will put it into the vessel we bring, whatever its form or size. Is a Christian's faith tied to forms and sacraments? Then the sacraments shall be the vehicle of the blessing. We can cut the watercourses, and Christ will let His grace flow to us in the lines which our faith has dug. The measure of His gifts, too, depends upon our capacity, which again largely depends on our faith. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." As long as we bring vessels, the oil flows; and when we stop it stops too. The practical conclusion from such thoughts is not that therefore it does not matter what our faith may be in purity or strength, since it will win a blessing, but that, since the blessings possible are infinite, and the only limit to our possession of them is the width and firmness of our faith, we should labour to enlarge it to the utmost capacity, to refine it to the most perfect purity, to strengthen it to the firmest grasp. The Christian's aim should ever be to cultivate a faith proportioned to the

firm faithfulness and boundless grace with which it unites him. Do not let us carry cups no bigger than thimbles to the fountain of the water of life. It will fill the largest vase we can carry. On the other hand, do not let us fear lest our faith is too timid, ignorant, sense-bound, or small, to get a blessing. The tiniest flower has its little dewdrop glistening in its calyx. If we can only get the tip of a finger to the hem of His garment, it is enough.

III. We have Christ's correction and strengthening of imperfect faith, in the very act of answering it. The woman would fain have stolen away with her new-found blessing; but Christ forces her to stand out before all the throng, and there, with all their eyes on her, to conquer her diffidence and womanly shame, and to tell all the truth. It strikes one as strangely unlike His ordinary desire to avoid notoriety, and His ordinary tender regard for shrinking weakness. What was the reason? He did not do thus for His own sake, nor chiefly for the sake of the bystanders, but for the woman's. Observe how the process of dealing with her fits into all the flaws in her faith. She had thought of the healing energy as independent of Christ's knowledge and will. Therefore, His first word shows that He was conscious of the healing power proceeding from Him,

and that it had gone forth by no magic, but by His wil answering the mute appeal which He had felt. "Who touched Me?" Amid all the jostling of the unmannerly crowd that pressed round Him in rude contact, He had felt one touch unlike all the rest, had known what it meant, and, by an act of His own will, moved by His love and pity, had sent forth the power which had healed. The healing granted to imperfect faith became a lesson in faith, when she was taught by it Christ's knowledge of her thin finger on His garment, and the real relation between the Giver and His gift. That question of Christ's carries with it a truth for us. Though all creatures crowd around Him, He distinguishes the needs of each; and amid all the press of suppliants who wait before Him He feels and answers the touch of the feeblest finger which the faintest faith puts forth. No unit is lost in the crowd to His eye. He has leisure, a heart and a hand for each.

The woman's faith had been selfish, absorbed in her own need, and caring for no personal relation with Jesus. She was taught that His gifts are all the fruit of His love, and not stolen, but given. If she had slunk out of the crowd, unhindered, and, as she thought, unobserved, she would have had no further connection with Jesus, and her first blessing from Him would have

been her last; but she has to learn His love, that she may trust His love in coming time, and may be led on from blind reliance on His healing power to knowledge and trust in His higher benefits. Her faith was cleansed of any taint of selfishness by being answered; and thus it became the foundation of self-surrender, and the Healer of the body became the centre and Saviour of the soul.

Her faith had been timid, shrinking from public acknowledgment. But she would have lost much if she had not been made to tell all. The answer to her faith makes her bold. The cowering invalid, shrinking into herself, becomes in one moment, a confessor, ready to bear the gaze of the crowd and to witness to His power. Christ cures our cowardice by giving us, faint-hearted though we be, the gift that, out of weakness, makes us strong. He wills that we should not hide His mercies in our hearts, and that for our own sake, as well as the sake of others, since the plant grown in the dark becomes pale and sickly, and bears neither bright blossoms nor sweet fruit.

Finally, the woman's faith attached importance to the touch by her finger, and our Lord's last word to her sets that in its true place, and teaches her that not the touch, but the faith that was in the touch, had been

the medium by which she received His healing power. He confirms by His own authoritative word the furtive blessing, and sends her away, perhaps to see Him no more, but to live in health and thankfulness, cherishing His love in her heart, and perfecting, as we may hope, the very imperfect faith which had been so wondrously answered and educated.

LESSON VIII

The Master Rejected: the Servants Sent Forth

St. Mark vi. 1-13

1. "And He went out from thence, and came into His own country; and His disciples follow Him.

2. And when the Sabbath day was come, He began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing Him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto Him, that even such mighty works are wrought by His hands?

3. Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him.

4. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.

5. And He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.

6. And He marvelled because of their unbelief. And He went round about the villages, teaching.

7. And He called unto Him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;

8. And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse:

9. But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.

10. And He said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place.

11. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

12. And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

13. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them."

AN easy day's journey would carry Jesus and His followers from Capernaum, on the lake-side, to Nazareth, among the hills. What took our Lord back there? When last He taught in the synagogue of Nazareth, His life had been in danger; and now He thrusts Himself into the wolf's den. Why? Mark seems to wish us to observe the connection between this visit and the great group of miracles which he has just recorded; and possibly the link may be our Lord's hope that the report of these might have preceded Him and prepared His way. In His patient long-suffering He will give His fellow-villagers another chance; and His heart yearns for "His own country," and "His own kin," and "His own house," of whom He speaks so pathetically in the context.

I. We have here unbelief born of familiarity, and its effects on Christ (verses 1-6). Observe the characteristic avoidance of display, and the regard for existing means of worship shown in His waiting till the Sabbath, and then resorting to the synagogue. He and His hearers would both remember His last appearance in it; and He and they would both remember many a time before that, when, as a youth, he had sat there. The rage which had exploded on His first sermon has given place to calmer, but not less bitter, opposition. Mark paints the

scene, and represents the hearers as discussing Jesus while He spoke. The decorous silence of the synagogue was broken by a hubbub of mutual questions. "Many" spoke at once, and all had the same thing to say. The state of mind revealed is curious. They own Christ's wisdom in His teaching, and the reality of His miracles, of which they had evidently heard; but the fact that He was one of themselves made them angry that He should have such gifts, and suspicious of where He had got them. They seem to have had the same opinion as Nathanael—that no "good thing" could "come out of Nazareth." Their old companion could not be a prophet; that was certain. But He had wisdom and miraculous power; that was as certain. Where had they come from? There was only one other source; and so, with many headshakings, they were preparing to believe that the Jesus whom they had all known, living His quiet life of labour among them, was in league with the devil, rather than believe that He was a messenger from God.

We note in their questions, first, the glimpse of our Lord's early life. They bring before us the quiet, undistinguished home and the long years of monotonous labour. We owe to Mark alone the notice that Jesus actually wrought at Joseph's handicraft. Apparently the

latter was dead, and, if so, Jesus would be the head of the house, and probably the "bread-winner." One of the fathers preserves the tradition that He "made plows and yokes, by which He taught the symbols of righteousness and an active life." That good father seems to think it needful to find symbolical meanings, in order to save Christ's dignity; but the prose fact that He toiled at the carpenter's bench, and handled hammer and saw, needs nothing to heighten its value as a sign of His true participation in man's lot, and as the hallowing of manual toil. How many weary arms have grasped their tools with new vigour and contentment when they thought of Him as their Pattern in their narrow toils! The Nazarenes' difficulty was but one case of a universal tendency. Nobody finds it easy to believe that some village child, who has grown up beside him, and whose undistinguished outside life he knows, has turned out a genius or a great man. The last people to recognise a prophet are always his kindred and his countrymen. "Far-away birds have fine feathers." Men resent it as a kind of slight on themselves that the other, who was one of them but yesterday, should be so far above them to-day. They are mostly too blind to look below the surface, and they conclude that, because they saw so much of the external life, they

knew the man that lived it. The elders of Nazareth had seen Jesus grow up, and to them He would be "the carpenter's son" still. The more important people had known the humbleness of His home, and could not adjust themselves to look up to Him, instead of down. His equals in age would find their boyish remembrances too strong for accepting Him as a prophet. All of them did just what the most of us would have done, when they took it for certain that the Man whom they had known so well, as they fancied, could not be a prophet, to say nothing of the Messiah so long looked for. It is easy to blame them; but it is better to learn the warning in their words, and to take care that we are not blind to some true messenger of God just because we have been blessed with close companionship with him. Many a household has had to wait for death to take away the prophet before they knew him. Some of us entertain angels unawares, and have bitterly to feel, when too late, that our eyes were holden that we should not know them

These questions bring out strongly what we too often forget in estimating Christ's contemporaries—namely, that His presence among them, in the simplicity of His human life, was a positive hindrance to their seeing His true character. We sometimes wish that we had

seen Him, and heard His voice. We should have found it more difficult to believe in Him if we had. "His flesh" was a "veil" in other sense than the Epistle to the Hebrews means; for, by reason of men's difficulty in piercing beneath it, it hid from many what it was meant and fitted to reveal. Only eyes purged beheld the glory of "the Word" become flesh when it "dwelt among us"—and even they saw Him more clearly when they saw Him no more. Let us not be too hard on these simple Nazarenes, but recognise our kith and kin.

The facts on which the Nazarenes grounded their unbelief are really irrefragable proof of Christ's Divinity. Whence had this man His wisdom and mighty works? Born in that humble home, reared in that secluded village, shut out from the world's culture, buried, as it were, among an exclusive and abhorred people, how came He to tower above all teachers, and to sway the world? "With whom took He counsel? and who instructed Him, and taught Him?" The character and work of Christ, compared with the circumstances of His origin and environment, are an insoluble riddle, except on one supposition—that He was the word and power of God.

The effects of this unbelief on our Lord were twofold.

It limited His power. Matthew says that "He did not many mighty works." Mark goes deeper, and boldly says "He could not." It is mistaken jealousy for Christ's honour to seek to pare down the strong words. The atmosphere of chill unbelief froze the stream. The power was there, but it required for its exercise some measure of moral susceptibility. His miraculous energy followed, in general, the same law as His higher exercise of saving grace does; that is to say, it could not force itself upon unwilling men. Christ "cannot" save a man who does not trust Him. He was hampered in the outflow of His healing power by unsympathetic disparagement and unbelief. Man can thwart God. Faith opens the door, and unbelief shuts it in His face. He "would have gathered," but "ye would not," and therefore He "could not."

The second effect of unbelief on Him was that He "marvelled." He is twice recorded to have wondered —once at a Gentile's faith, once at His townsmen's unbelief. He wondered at the first because it showed so unusual a susceptibility; at the second, because it showed so unreasonable a blindness. All sin is a wonder to eyes that see into the realities of things and read the end; for it is all utterly unreasonable (though it

is, alas! not unaccountable) and suicidal. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this." Unbelief in Christ is, by Himself, declared to be the very climax of sin, and its most flagrant evidence (John xvi. 9); and of all the instances of unbelief which saddened His heart, none struck more chill than that of these Nazarenes. They had known His pure youth; He might have reckoned on some touch of sympathy and predisposition to welcome Him. His wonder is the measure of His pain as well as of their sin. Nor need we wonder that He wondered; for He was true man, and all human emotions were His. To one who lives ever in the Father's bosom, what can seem so strange as that men should prefer homeless exposedness and dreary loneliness? To one whose eyes ever behold unseen realities, what so marvellous as men's blindness? To one who knew so assuredly His own mission and rich freightage of blessing how strange it must have been that He found so few to accept His gifts! Jesus knew that bitter wonder which all men who have a truth to proclaim which the world has not learned, have to experience—the amazement at finding it so hard to get any others to see what they see. In His manhood, He shared the fate of all teachers, who have, in their turn, to marvel at men's unbelief.

II. The new instrument which Christ fashions to cope with unbelief. What does Jesus do when thus wounded in the house of His friends? Give way to despondency? No; but meekly betakes Himself to yet obscurer fields of service, and sends out the twelve to prepare His way, as if He thought that they might have success where He would fail. What a lesson for people who are always hankering after conspicuous "spheres," and lamenting that their gifts are wasted in some obscure corner, is that picture of Jesus, repulsed from Nazareth, patiently turning to the villages! The very summary account of the trial mission of the twelve here given presents only the salient points of the charge to them, and in its condensation makes these the more emphatic. Note the interesting statement that they were sent out two-and-two. The other evangelists do not tell us this, but their lists of the apostles are arranged in pairs. Mark's list is not so arranged, but he supplies the reason for the arrangement, which he does not follow; and the other Gospels, by their arrangement, confirm his statement, which they do not give. Two-and-two is a wise rule for all Christian workers. It checks individual peculiarities and self-will, helps to keep off faults, wholesomely stimulates, strengthens faith by giving another to hear it and to speak it, brings companionship, and admits of

division of labour. One-and-one are more than twice one.

The first point is the gift of power. Unclean spirits are specified, but the subsequent verses show that miracle-working power in its other forms was included. We may call that Christ's greatest miracle. That He could, by His mere will, endow a dozen men with such power, is more, if degree come into view at all, than that He Himself should exercise it. But there is a lesson in the fact for all ages—even those in which miracles have ceased. Christ gives before He commands, and sends no man into the field without filling his basket with seed-corn. His gifts assimilate the receiver to Himself, and only in the measure in which His servants possess the power which is like His own, and drawn from Him, can they proclaim His coming, or prepare hearts for it. The second step is their equipment. The special commands here given were repealed by Jesus when He gave His last commands. In their letter they apply only to that one journey, but in their spirit they are of universal and permanent obligation. The twelve were to travel light. They might carry a staff to help them along, and wear sandals to save their feet on rough roads; but that was to be all. Food, luggage, and money, the three requisites of a traveller, were to be "conspicuous

by their absence." That was repealed afterwards, and instructions given of an opposite character, because, after His ascension, the Church was to live more and more by ordinary means; but in this journey they were to learn to trust Him without means, that afterwards they might trust Him in the means. He showed them the purpose of these restrictions in the act of abrogating them. "When I sent you forth without purse . . . lacked ye anything?" But the spirit remains unabrogated, and the minimum of outward provision is likeliest to call out the maximum of faith. We are more in danger from having too much baggage than from too little. And the one indispensable requirement is that, whatever the quantity, it should hinder neither our march nor our trust in Him who alone is wealth and food.

Next comes the disposition of the messengers. It is not to be self-indulgent. They are not to change quarters for the sake of greater comfort. They have not gone out to make a pleasure tour, but to preach, and so are to stay where they are welcomed, and to make the best of it. Delicate regard for kindly hospitality, if offered by ever so poor a house, and scrupulous abstinence from whatever might suggest interested motives, must mark the true servant. That rule is not out of date. If ever a herald of Christ falls under suspicion of

caring more about life's comforts than about his work, good-bye to his usefulness. If ever he does so care, whether he be suspected of it or no, spiritual power will ebb from him.

The next step is the messengers' demeanour to the rejectors of their message. Shaking the dust off the sandal is an emblem of solemn renunciation of participation, and perhaps of disclaimer of responsibility. It meant certainly, "We have no more to do with you," and possibly, "our blood be on your own heads." This journey of the twelve was meant to be of short duration, and to cover much ground, and therefore no time was to be spent unnecessarily. Their message was brief, and as well told quickly as slowly. The whole conditions of work now are different. Sometimes, perhaps, a Christian is warranted in solemnly declaring to those who receive not his message, that he will have no more to say to them. That may do more than all his other words. But such cases are rare; and the rule that it is safest to follow is rather that of love, which despairs of none, and, though often repelled, returns with pleading, and, if it have told often in vain, now tells with tears, the story of the love that never abandons the most obstinate.

Such were the prominent points of this first Christian

mission. They who carry Christ's banner in the world must be possessed of power, His gift, must be lightly weighted, must care less for comfort than for service, must solemnly warn of the consequences of rejecting the message; and they will not fail to cast out devils, and to heal many that are sick.

LESSON IX

Christ's Cross, and Ours

ST. MARK viii. 27-ix. 1

27. "And Jesus went out, and His disciples, into the towns of Cæsarea Philippi: and by the way He asked His disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

28. And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

29. And He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto Him, Thou art the Christ.

30. And He charged them that they should tell no man of of Him.

31. And He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him.

33. But when He had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

34. And when He had called the people unto Him with His disciples also, He said unto them, Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

35. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

36. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

37. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

1. And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

OUR Lord led His disciples away from familiar ground into the comparative seclusion of the country round Cæsarea Philippi, in order to tell them plainly of His death. He knew how terrible the announcement would be, and He desired to make it in some quiet spot, where there would be collectedness and leisure to let it sink into their minds. His consummate wisdom and perfect tenderness are equally and beautifully shown in His manner of disclosing the truth which would try their faithfulness and fortitude. From the beginning He had given hints, gradually increasing in clearness; and now the time had come for full disclosure. What a journey that was! He, with the heavy secret filling His thoughts; they, dimly aware of something absorbing Him, in which they had no part. And, at last, "in the way," as if moved by some sudden impulse —like that which we all know, leading us to speak out abruptly what we have long waited to say—He gives them a share in the burden of His thought. But, even then, note how He leads up to it by degrees. Our lesson has the announcement of the Cross as its centre, prepared for, on the one hand, by a question, and followed, on the other, by a warning that His followers must travel the same road.

I. Note the preparation for the announcement of the

Cross (verses 27-30). Why did Christ begin by asking about the popular judgment of His personality? Apparently in order to bring clearly home to the disciples that, as far as the masses were concerned, His work and theirs had failed, and had, for net result, total misconception. Who that had the faintest glimmer of what He was could suppose that the stern, fiery spirits of Elijah or John had come to life again in Him? The second question, "But whom say ye that I am?" with its sharp transition, is meant to force home the conviction of the gulf between His disciples and the whole nation. He would have them feel their isolation, and face the fact that they stood alone in their faith; and he would test them whether, knowing that they did stand alone, they had courage and tenacity to reassert it. The unpopularity of a belief drives away cowards, and draws the brave and true. If none else believed in Him, that was an additional reason for loving hearts cleaving to Him; and those only truly know and love Him who are ready to stand by Him, if they stand alone—*Athanasius contra mundum.* Mark, too, that this is the all-important question for every man. Our own individual "thought" of Him determines our whole worth and fate.

Mark gives Peter's confession in a lower key, as it were, than Matthew does, omitting the full-toned clause,

"The Son of the living God." This is not because Mark has a lower conception than his brother evangelist, for the first words of this Gospel announce that it is "the Gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God." And, as he has identified the two conceptions at the outset, he must, in all fairness, be supposed to consider that the one implies the other, and to include both here. But possibly there is truth in the observation that the omission is one of a number of instances in which this Gospel passes lightly over the exalted side of Christ's nature, in accordance with its purpose of setting Him forth rather as the servant than as the Lord. It is not meant that that exalted side was absent from Mark's thoughts, but that his design led him rather to emphasize the other. Matthew's is the Gospel of the King; Mark's, of the Worker.

The omission of Christ's eulogium on Peter has often been pointed out as an interesting corroboration of the tradition that he was Mark's source; and so that the failure to record the praise, and the carefulness to tell the subsequent rebuke, reveal the humble-hearted "elder" into whom the self-confident young man had grown. Flesh delights to recall praise; faith and self-knowledge find more profit in remembering errors forgiven and rebukes deserved, and in their severity, most

loving. How did these questions and their answers serve as introduction to the announcement of the Cross? In several ways. They brought clearly before the disciples the hard fact of Christ's rejection by the popular voice, and defined their position as sharply antagonistic. If His claims were thus unanimously tossed aside, a collision must come. A rejected Messiah could not fail to be, sooner or later, a slain Messiah. Then clear, firm faith in His Messiahship was needed, to enable them to stand the ordeal to which the announcement, and, still more, its fulfilment, would subject them. A suffering Messiah might be a rude shock to all their dreams; but a suffering Jesus, who was not Messiah, would have been the end of their discipleship. Again, the significance and worth of the Cross could only be understood when seen in the light of that great confession. Even as now, we must first believe that He who died was the Son of the living God before we can see what that death was and did. An imperfect conception of who Jesus is takes the meaning and the power out of all His life, but, most of all, impoverishes the infinite preciousness of His death.

The charge of silence contrasts singularly with the former employment of the apostles as heralds of Jesus. The silence was partly punitive and partly prudential.

It was punitive, inasmuch as the people had already had abundantly the proclamation of His gospel, and had cast it away. It was in accordance with the solemn law of God's retributive justice that offers rejected should be withdrawn; and from them that had not, even that which they had should be taken away. Christ never bids His servants be silent until men have refused to hear their speech. The silence enjoined was also prudential, in order to avoid hastening on the inevitable collision; not because Christ desired escape, but because He would first fulfil His day.

II. We have here the announcement of the Cross (verses 31-33). There had been many hints before this; for Christ saw the end from the beginning, however far back in the depths of time or eternity we place that beginning. We do not sufficiently realise that His death was before Him, all through His days, as the great purpose for which He had come. If the anticipation of sorrow is the multiplication of sorrow, even when there is hope of escaping it, how much must His have been multiplied, and a bitterness been diffused through all His life, by that foresight, so clear and constant, of the certain end! How much more gracious and wonderful His quick sympathy, His patient self-forgetfulness, His unwearied toil, show against that dark background!

Mark here the solemn necessity. Why "must" He suffer? Not because of the enmity of the three sets of rejecters. He recognises no necessity which is imposed by hostile human power. The cords which bind this sacrifice to the horns of the altar were not spun by men's hands. The great "must" which ruled His life was a cable of two strands—obedience to the Father, and love to men. These haled Him to the Cross, and fastened Him there. He would save; therefore He "must" die. The same "must" stretches beyond death. Resurrection is a part of the whole work; and, without it, the death has no power, but falls into the undistinguished mass. Bewildered as the disciples were, that assurance of resurrection had little present force, but even then would faintly hint at some comfort and blessed mystery. What was to them a nebulous hope is to us a sun of certitude and cheer. "Christ that died" is no gospel until you go on to say, "Yea, rather, that is risen again."

Peter's rash "rebuke," like most of his appearances in the gospel, is strangely compounded of warm-hearted, impulsive love and presumptuous self-confidence. No doubt, the praise which he had just received had turned his head, not very steady in these early days at its best, and the dignity which had been promised him would

seem to him to be sadly overclouded by the prospect opened in Christ's forecast. But he was not thinking of himself; and when he said, "This shall not be unto Thee," probably he meant to suggest that they would all draw the sword to defend their Master. Mark's use of the word "rebuke," which is also Matthew's, seems to imply that he found fault with Christ. For what? Probably for not trusting to his followers' arms, or for letting himself become a victim to the "must" which Peter thought of as depending only on the power of the ecclesiastics in Jerusalem. He blames Christ for not hoisting the flag of a revolt.

This blind love was the nearest approach to sympathy which Christ received; and it was repugnant to Him, so as to draw the sharpest words from Him that He ever spoke to a loving heart. In his eagerness, Peter had taken Jesus on one side to whisper his suggestion; but Christ will have them all hear His rejection of the counsel. Therefore He "turned about," facing the rest of the group, and by the act putting Peter behind Him, and speaks aloud the stern words. Not thus was He wont to repel ignorant love, nor to tell out faults in public; but the act witnessed to the recoil of His fixed spirit from the temptation which addressed His natural human shrinking from death, as well as to His desire that, once

for all, every dream of resistance by force should be shattered. He hears in Peter's voice the tone of that other voice, which, in the wilderness, had suggested the same temptation to escape the cross and win the crown by worshipping the devil; and he puts the meaning of His instinctive gesture into the same words in which he had rejected that earlier seducing suggestion. Jesus was a man, and the things "that be of men" found a response in His sinless nature. It shrank from pain and the Cross with innocent and inevitable shrinking. Does not the very severity of the rebuke testify to its having set some chords vibrating in His soul? Note that it may be the work of "Satan" to appeal to the things "that be of men," however innocent, if by so doing obedience to God's will is hindered. Note, too, that Simon may be "Peter" at one moment, and "Satan" at the next.

III. We have here the announcement of the Cross as the law for the disciples too (verses 34-38). Christ's followers must follow, but men can choose whether they will be His followers or not. So the "must" is changed into "let him," and the "if any man will" is put in the forefront. The conditions are fixed, but the choice of accepting the position is free. A wider circle hears the terms of discipleship than heard the announcement of

Christ's own sufferings. The terms are for all and for us. The law is stated in verse 34, and then a series of reasons for it, and motives for accepting it, follow.

The law for every disciple is self-denial and taking up his cross. How present His own Cross must have been to Christ's vision, since the thought is introduced here, though He had not spoken of it, in foretelling His own death! It is not Christ's Cross that we have to take up. His sufferings stand alone, incapable of repetition and needing none; but each has his own. To slay the life of self is always pain, and there is no discipleship without crucifying "the old man." Taking up my cross does not merely mean accepting meekly God-sent or men-inflicted sorrows, but persistently carrying on the special form of self-denial which my special type of character requires. It will include these other meanings, but it goes deeper than they. Such self-immolation is the same thing as following Christ; for, with all the infinite difference between His Cross and ours, they are both crosses, and on the one hand there is no real discipleship without self-denial, and on the other there is no full self-denial without discipleship.

The first of the reasons for the law, in verse 35, is a paradox, and a truth with two sides. To wish to save is to lose life; to lose it for Christ's sake is to save it.

Both are true, even without taking the future into account. The life of self is death; the death of the lower self is the life of the true self. The man who lives absorbed in the miserable care for his own well-being is dead to all which makes life noble, sweet, and real. Flagrant vice is not needed to kill the real life. Clean, respectable selfishness does the work effectually. The deadly gas is invisible, and has no smell. But while all selfishness is fatal, it is self-surrender and sacrifice, "for My sake and the gospel's," which is life-giving. Heroism, generous self-devotion without love to Christ, is noble, but falls short of discipleship, and may even aggravate the sin of the man who exhibits it, because it shows what treasures he could lay at Christ's feet, if he would. It is only self-denial made sweet by reference to Him that leads to life. Who is this who thus demands that He should be the motive for which men shall hate their own lives, and calmly assumes power to reward such sacrifice with a better life? The paradox is true, if we include a reference to the future, which is usually taken to be its only meaning; but on that familiar thought we need not enlarge.

The "for" of verse 36 seems to refer back to the law in verse 34, and the verse enforces the command by an appeal to self-interest, which, in the highest sense of the

word, dictates self-sacrifice. The men who live for self are dead, as Christ has been saying. Suppose their self-living had been "successful" to the highest point, what would be the good of all the world to a dead man? "Shrouds have no pockets." He makes a poor bargain who sells his soul for the world. A man gets rich, and in the process has dropped generous impulses, affections, interest in noble things, perhaps principle and religion. He has shrivelled and hardened into a mere fragment of himself; and so, when the success comes, he cannot much enjoy it, and was happier, poor and sympathetic, and enthusiastic and generous, than he is now, rich and dwindled. He who loses himself in gaining the world does not win it, but is mastered by it. This motive, too, like the preceding, has a double application—to the facts of life here, when they are seen in their deepest reality, and to the solemn future.

To that future our Lord passes, as His last reason for the command and motive for obeying it, in verse 38. One great hindrance to out-and-out discipleship is fear of what the world will say. Hence come compromises and weak compliance on the part of disciples too timid to stand alone, or too sensitive to face a sarcasm and a smile. A wholesome contempt for the world's cackle is needed for following Christ. The geese on the

common hiss at the passer-by who goes steadily through the flock. How grave and awful is that irony, if we may call it so, which casts the retribution in the mould of the sin! The judge shall be "ashamed" of such unworthy disciples—shall blush to own such as His. May we venture to put stress on the fact that He does not say that He will reject them? They who were ashamed of Him were secret and imperfect disciples. Perhaps, though He be ashamed of them, though they have brought Him no credit, He will not wholly turn from them.

How marvellous the transition from the prediction of the Cross to this of the Throne The Son of man must suffer many things, and the same Son of man shall come, attended by hosts of spirits who own Him for their King, and surrounded by the uncreated blaze of the glory of God, in which He sits throned as His native abode. We do not know Jesus unless we know Him as the crucified Sacrifice for the world's sins, and as the exalted Judge of the world's deeds.

He adds a weighty word of enigmatical meaning, lest any should think that He was speaking only of some far-off judgment. The destruction of Jerusalem seems to be the event intended, which was, in fact, the beginning of retribution for Israel, and the starting-point of

a more conspicuous manifestation of the kingdom of God. It was, therefore, a kind of rehearsal, or picture in little, of that coming and ultimate great day of the Lord, and was meant to be a "sign" that it should surely come.

LESSON X

Receiving and Forbidding

ST. MARK ix. 33-42

33. "And He came to Capernaum: and being in the house He asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

34. But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest.

35. And He sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

36. And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when He had taken him in His arms, He said unto them,

37. Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me: and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me.

38. And John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.

39. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of Me.

40. For he that is not against us is on our part.

41. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

42. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."

SURELY the disciples might have found something better to talk about on the road from Cæsarea, where they had heard from Jesus of His sufferings,

than this miserable wrangle about rank! Singularly enough, each announcement of the Cross seems to have provoked something of the sort. Probably they understood little of His meaning, but hazily thought that the crisis was at hand when He should establish the kingdom; and so their ambition, rather than their affection, was stirred. Perhaps, too, the dignity bestowed on Peter after his confession, and the favour shown to the three witnesses of the transfiguration, may have created jealousy. Matthew makes the quarrel to have been about future precedence; Mark, about present. The one was striven for with a view to the other. How chill it must have struck on Christ's heart, that those who loved Him best cared so much more for their own petty superiority than for His sorrows!

I. Note the law of service as the true greatness (verses 33-35). "When He was in the house, He asked them." He had let them talk as they would on the road, walking alone in front, and they keeping, as they thought, out of ear-shot; but, when at rest together in the house (perhaps Peter's) where He lived in Capernaum, He lets them see, by the question, and still more by the following teaching, that He knew what He asked, and needed no answer. The tongues that had been so loud on the road were dumb in the house

—silenced by conscience. His servants still do and say many things on the road which they would not do if they saw Him close beside them, and sometimes fancy that these escape Him. But when they are "in the house" with Him, they will find that He knew all that was going on; and when He asks the account of it, they, too, will be speechless. "A thing which does not appear wrong by itself shows its true character when brought to the judgment of God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Bengel).

Christ deals with the fault with much solemnity, seating Himself, as teacher and superior, and summoning the whole twelve to hear. We do not enter on the difficult question of the relation of Mark's report of our Lord's words to those of the other evangelists, but rather try to bring out the significance of their form and connection here. Note, then, that here we have not so much the nature of true greatness as the road to it. "If any man would be first," he is to be least and servant, and thereby he will reach his aim. Of course, that involves the conception of the nature of true greatness as service, but still the distinction is to be kept in view. Further, "last of all" is not the same as "servant of all." The one expresses humility; the other, ministry. An indolent humility, so very humble

that it does nothing for others, and a service which is not humble, are equally incomplete, and neither leads to nor is the greatness at which alone a Christian ought to aim. There are two paradoxes here. The lowest is the highest—the servant is the chief; and they may be turned round with equal truth—the highest is the lowest, and the chief is the servant. The former tell us how things really are, and what they look like, when seen from the centre by His eye. The latter prescribe the duties and responsibilities of high position. In fact and truth, to sink is the way to rise, and to serve is the way to rule—only the rise and the rule are of another sort than content worldly ambition, and the Christian must rectify his notions of what loftiness and greatness are. On the other hand, distinguishing gifts of mind, heart, leisure, position, possessions, or anything else, are given us for others, and bind us to serve. Both things follow from the nature of Christ's kingdom, which is a kingdom of love; for in love the vulgar distinctions of higher and lower are abolished, and service is delight. This is no mere pretty sentiment, but a law which grips hard and cuts deep. Christ's servants have not learned it yet, and the world heeds it not; but, till it govern all human society, and cut up ambition, domination, and pride of place by the

roots, society will groan under ills which increase with the increase of wealth and culture in the hands of a selfish few.

II. Note the exhibition of the law in a life. Children are quick at finding out who loves them, and there would always be some hovering near for a smile from Christ. With what eyes of innocent wonder the child would look up at Him, as He gently set him there, in the open space in front of Himself! Mark does not record any accompanying words, and none were needed. The unconsciousness of rank, the spontaneous acceptance of inferiority, the absence of claims to consideration and respect, which naturally belong to childhood, as it ought to be, and give it winningness and grace, are the marks of a true disciple, and are the more winning in such because they are not of nature, but regained by self-abnegation. What the child is we have to become. This child was the example of one-half of the law, being "least of all," and perfectly contented to be so; but the other half was not shown in him, for his little hands could do but small service. Was there, then, no example in this scene of that other requirement? Surely there was; for the child was not left standing, shy in the middle, but, before embarrassment became weeping, was caught up in Christ's arms, and folded to His

heart. He had been taken as the instance of humility and he then became the subject of tender ministry. Christ and he divided the illustration of the whole law between them, and the very inmost nature of true service was shown in our Lord's loving clasp and soothing pressure to His heart. It is as if He had said, "Look! this is how you must serve; for you cannot help the weak unless you open your arms and hearts to them." Jesus, with the child held to His bosom, is the living law of service, and the child nestling close to Him, because sure of His love, is the type of the trustful affection which we must evoke if we are to serve or help. This picture has gone straight to the hearts of men; and who can count the streams of tenderness and practical kindliness of which it has been the source?

Christ goes on to speak of the child, not as the example of service, but of being served. The deep words carry us into blessed mysteries which recompense the lowly servants, and lift them high in the kingdom. Observe the precision of the language, both as regards the persons received and the motive of reception. "One of such little children" means those who are thus lowly, unambitious, and unexacting. "In My name" defines the motive as not being simple humanity or benevolence,

but the distinct recognition of Christ's command and loving obedience to His revealed character. No doubt, natural benevolence has its blessings for those who exercise it; but that which is here spoken of is something much deeper than nature, and wins a far higher reward. That reward is held forth in unfathomable words, of which we can but skim the surface. They mean more than that such little ones are so closely identified with Him that, in His love, He reckons good done to them as done to Him. That is most blessedly true. Nor is it true only because He lovingly reckons the deed as done to Him, though it really is not; but, by reason of the derived life which all His children possess from Him, they are really parts of Himself; and in that most real though mystic unity, what is done to them is, in fact, done to Him. Further, if the service be done in His name, then, on whomsoever it may be done, it is done to Him. This great saying unveils the true sacredness and real recipient of all Christian service. But more than that is in the words. When we "receive" Christ's little ones by help and loving ministry, we receive Him, and in Him God, for joy and strength. Unselfish deeds in His name open the heart for more of Christ and God, and bring on the doer the blessing of fuller insight, closer communion, more

complete assimilation to his Lord. Therefore such service is the road to the true superiority in His kingdom, which depends altogether on the measure of His own nature which has flowed into our emptiness.

III. The apostles' conscience-stricken confession of their breach of the law (verses 38-40). Peter is not spokesman this time, but John, whose conscience was more quickly pricked. At first sight, the connection of his interruption with the theme of the discourse seems to be merely the recurrence of the phrase, "in Thy name;" but, besides that, there is an obvious contrast between "receiving" and "forbidding." The apostle is uneasy when he remembers what they had done, and, like an honest man, he states the case to Christ, half-confessing, and half-asking for a decision. He begins to think that perhaps the man whom they had silenced was "one such little child," and had deserved more sympathetic treatment. How he came to be so true a disciple as to share in the power of casting out devils, and yet not to belong to the closer followers of Jesus, we do not know, and need not guess. So it was; and John feels, as he tells the story, that perhaps their motives had not been so much their Master's honour as their own. "He followeth not us," and yet he is trenching on our prerogatives. The greater fact that he and they followed Christ was

overshadowed by the lesser that he did not follow them. There spoke the fiery spirit which craved the commission to burn up a whole village, because of its inhospitality. There spoke the spirit of ecclesiastical intolerance, which in all ages has masqueraded as zeal for Christ, and taken following us and following Him to be the same thing. But there spoke, too, a glimmering consciousness that gagging men was not precisely "receiving" them, and that if "in Thy name" so sanctified deeds, perhaps the unattached exorcist, who could cast out demons by it, was "a little one," to be taken to their hearts, and not an enemy to be silenced. Pity that so many listen to the law, and do not, like John, feel it prick them!

Christ forbids such "forbidding," and thereby sanctions "irregularities" and "unattached" work, which have always been the bugbears of sticklers for ecclesiastical uniformity, and have not seldom been the life of Christianity. That authoritative, unconditional "forbid him not" ought, long ago, to have rung the funeral bell of intolerance, and to have ended the temptation to idolise "conformity," and to confound union to organised forms of the Christian community with union to Christ. But bigotry dies hard. The reasons appended serve to explain the position of the man in question. If he had wrought miracles in Christ's name, he must

have had some faith in it; and his experience of its power would deepen that. So there was no danger of his contradicting himself, and speaking against Jesus. The power of faith in the Name to hallow deeds, the certainty that rudimentary faith will, when exercised, increase the guarantee of experience as sure to lead to blessing Jesus, are all involved in this saying. But its special importance is as a reason for the disciples' action. Because the man's action gives guarantees for his future, they are not to silence him. That implies that they are only to forbid those who do speak evil of Christ; and that to all others, even if they have not reached the full perception of truth, they are to extend patient forbearance and guidance. "The mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped;" but the mouth that begins to stammer His name is to be taught and cherished.

The second reason still more plainly claims the man for an ally. Commentators have given themselves a great deal of trouble to reconcile this saying with the other—"He that is not with Me is against Me." If by reconciling is meant twisting both to mean the same thing, it cannot be done. If preventing the appearance of contradiction is meant, it does not seem necessary. The two sayings do not contradict, but they complete each other. They apply to different classes of persons,

and common sense has to determine their application. This man did, in some sense, believe in Jesus, and worked deeds that proved the power of the Name. Plainly, such work was in the same direction as the Lord's and the disciples'. Such a case is one for the application of tolerance. But the principle must be limited by the other, else it degenerates into lazy indifference. "He that is not against us is for us," if it stood alone, would dissolve the Church, and destroy distinctions in belief and practice which it would be fatal to lose. "He that is not with Me is against Me," if it stood alone, would narrow sympathies, and cramp the free development of life. We need both to understand and get the good of either.

IV. We have the reward of receiving Christ's little ones set over against the retribution that seizes those who cause them to stumble (verses 41, 42). These verses seem to resume the broken thread of verse 37, whilst they also link on to the great principle laid down in verse 40. He that is not against is for, even if he only gives a cup of water because they are Christ's. That shows that there is some regard for Jesus in him. It is a germ which may grow. Such an one shall certainly have his reward. That does not mean that he will receive it in a future life, but that here his deed shall

bring after it blessed consequences to himself. Of these, none will be more blessed than the growing regard for the Name, which already is, in some degree, precious to him. The faintest perception of Christ's beauty, honestly lived out, will be increased. Every act strengthens its motive. The reward of living our convictions is firmer and more enlightened conviction. Note, too, the person spoken of belongs to the same class as the silenced exorcist, thus reading the disciples a further lesson. Jesus will look with love on the acts which even a John wished to forbid. Note, also, that the disciples here are the recipients of the kindness. They are no longer being taught to receive the little ones, but are taught that they themselves belong to that class, and need kindly succour from these outsiders, whom they had proudly thought to silence.

The awful, reticent words, which shadow forth and yet hide the fate of those who cause the feeblest disciple to stumble, are not for us to dilate upon. Jesus saw the realities of future retribution, and deliberately declares that death is a less evil than such an act. The little ones are sacred because they are His. The same relation to Him which made kindness to them so worthy of reward, makes harm to them so worthy of punishment. Under the one lies an incipient love to Him; under the

other, a covert and perhaps scarcely-conscious opposition. It is devils' work to seduce simple souls from allegiance to Christ. There are busy hands to-day laying stumbling-blocks in the way, especially of young Christians—stumbling-blocks of doubt, of frivolity, of slackened morality, and the like. It were better, says One who saw clearly into that awful realm beyond, if the big millstone were knotted about their necks, and they were flung into the deepest place of the lake that lay before Him as he spoke. He does not speak exaggerated words; and if a solemn strain of vehemence, unlike His ordinary calm, is audible here, it is because what He knew, and did not tell, gave solemn earnestness to His veiled and awe-inspiring prophecy of doom. What imagination shall fill out the details of the "worse than" which lurks behind that "better"?

LESSON XI

Lavish Love Condemned and Commended

ST. MARK xiv. 1-9

1. "After two days was the feast of the Passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by craft, and put Him to death.

2. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.

3. And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on His head.

4. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

5. For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

6. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on Me.

7. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but Me ye have not always.

8. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying.

9. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

WE might almost suppose that Mark had an artist's eye for the power of contrast to heighten effects, when he framed this sweetest story of uncalculating and lavish love, in the black surroundings of the preceding

and following paragraphs. How fair it shows between the calculating, cold-blooded hatred of the rulers and the treacherous covetousness of Judas! The vulpine shrewdness of the one and the greed of the other look uglier by the side of the woman's self-forgetting offering; and it gains even added tenderness and beauty from their hideousness. Truly, Christ was a marvellous test, revealing the thoughts of many hearts. The same manifestation of Divine beauty and goodness drew out Mary's burst of love, which found relief in devoting its most precious possession to Him, and the malignant cunning of scribes and priests, and the yet fouler treachery of Judas. Contact with Him either betters or worsens.

The differences between Mark's account and John's are full of interest. In the former, all the actors are anonymous, but the house of feasting is named as Simon's. In the latter, the "woman" is named as Mary, the sister of Lazarus; and the sour critic, who objected to love's lavishness in the name of practical charity, turns out to be Judas. These two figures are the incarnation of abiding opposites. There may have been prudential reasons for the suppression of Mary's name by the earlier evangelist, which had ceased to operate when John wrote; or we may have here only

another instance of His habit of supplying the names which are wanting in the Synoptics—a habit which seems to indicate at once His later date and His position as an eyewitness. His other variations point in the same direction. He remembers how strange it was to see Lazarus sitting at the table, perhaps with a far-away look in his eyes, and how Martha could only speak her gratitude by bustling service; and He knows the weight of the spikenard, and recalls, through all the intervening years, the fragrance that gushed from the opened box. He alone tells how, with the sweet mingling of humility and boldness which love alone knows how to blend, Mary anointed Christ's feet, and wiped them with her hair. He alone omits the promise of her deed being told as widely as the gospel, though to Him the "whole world" owes the name of the doer.

The characteristics of Mary's deed, which give it all its value, are its impulsiveness and its lavishness. She was anticipated in every needful form of service by the troop whom Martha marshalled. There were probably few superfluities in her home, but she had at least one precious thing—the costly flask of alabaster and its costly fragrant contents; and so, having nothing else that she can do to unburden her heart of its great load of thankfulness for her brother given back, she catches

up her solitary piece of woman's luxury, and pours it out, not stopping to ask if He needed to receive it, but feeling that she needed to give it. It could have been no more precious if it had been ever so "useful"; for all its worth came from the impulse to devote to Him her most valuable possession. It is the very absence of calculation which gives all its charm to the action. Just because so fragrant and costly a thing was expended for no practical purpose, was the expenditure "an odour of a sweet smell" more fragrant than the spikenard; and the heart which held such a depth of love was more precious than the translucent vase.

The "indignation," which began with Judas, and appears from Mark to have been taken up as admirable common sense by some, at least, of the others, does not show more wisdom, but less love, and, according to John, was, in Judas, simply irritation at seeing a valuable prey escape him. Fifty dollars, which might have been his—to say nothing of the vase so needlessly broken! Unloving selfishness is a poor critic either of the heroisms or of the sacrifices of love. "Practical" men with little religion see nothing but "waste" in most of the expenditure of money and effort which Christians lay at Christ's feet. The original author of the criticism does not recommend it, and, perhaps, usually the reproducers

of it care as little for the practical objects, to which they would have us confine ourselves, as He did.

Our Lord's answer goes very deep into the whole subject of Christian consecration, both of self and of possessions.

He lays down first the great motive of it all—"she hath wrought a good work on Me." The absolute singleness of its reference to Him made it "good." The question is not, "To what purpose?" but "For whose sake?" Everything done from the impulse of simple love to Jesus Christ is "good." All other devotion of powers or possessions is "waste"; for surely He who has given Himself for and to us deserves, and He in whom all sweetness and sufficiency dwell alone can satisfy the love of the soul, and make blessed the surrender of self and all. Christ's love to us and the capacities and yearnings of our nature alike show that the one "good" is to know and love Him, and the only "good work"—correspondent to the highest law of conduct—is a work which springs from the single-hearted love to Him as its motive, and tends to Him as its end. That is Christian morality. Whosoever understands that need have little care of carping critics.

Christ next strips the cavil of its disguise, and shows its insincerity: "Ye have the poor with you always,

and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but Me ye have not always." The solicitude for the poor which had seized the objectors so suddenly would have ample opportunities to express itself. Nothing was required for constant help to constant poverty but the will. That "whensoever ye will" is a sharp prick to conscience, and is meant to disclose the insincerity of the care which is so occasional, though the misery which it affects to pity is so continual. True benevolence is not an intermittent fountain, but a perennial stream. The same taint of insincerity is plain enough in the objectors, nowadays, to various forms of Christian effort. The people who tell us that foreign missions are waste, and that the money should be spent at home, spend very little of theirs at home. A lectures B about squandering wealth and work in such a way; but A's care for the domestic heathen goes no farther than thinking that B should do something for them. A does nothing, any more than Judas backed up his objection by a subscription for the poor of Bethany.

Further, our Lord here lays down the principle that circumstances may arise when our supreme love to Him not only warrants, but demands, the temporary neglect of perpetual and ordinary objects of liberality, in order to consecrate all our resources on some great act, which

shall worthily express our love, and can only be done once. He is not to be blamed as slothful or unfaithful who sequesters himself from many calls of need, that he may devote himself and his possessions to some one great act of service.

"She hath done what she could." There our Lord lays down the measure of acceptable consecration. It is an apology or vindication of the form of the offering; but it is a stringent demand as to its amount. If Mary had had half-a-dozen more alabaster vases, which she kept unbroken, would she have been so praised? Capacity regulates obligation, both as to the manner and the measure. "Power to its last particle is duty." Another man's way of serving and honouring Christ is little guide for me. There is a woeful lack of originality in Christian service, because so few Christians take stock of their individualities of character and specialties of position, and honestly try to learn from them what they should do.

> "Give all thou canst. High Heaven rejects the lore
> Of nicely-calculated less or more."

And, on the other hand, "it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

We have next set forth the significance which our Lord puts into the service which He accepts. "She is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying," said He, with a sad smile, as we may venture to picture. Probably no such purpose had been in Mary's thoughts, but she had simply obeyed the promptings of love, whose very life-breath is the yearning to give. But love is wiser than it knows, and the purposes which Christ can make its offerings serve are higher and sacreder than the offerer's intent. So it ever is. He puts meaning into our poor work, weaving it into the great fabric of His designs; and one joy of heaven will be the surprises at finding how much more we did than we supposed. "Lord, when saw we Thee—and visited Thee?" We—did we do that? If we take care of the motive, which is our end of the deed, He will take care of the result, which is His end.

Finally, we have Christ's promise of perpetuity for the service which He accepts. The fragrance of the spikenard soon vanished from Simon's house; but it smells sweet through all the world to-day, and will continue for ever. As we have noticed, the evangelists who give the promise of perpetual remembrance do not give Mary's name; and John's Gospel gives the name, and not the promise. It matters little whether or no our

names live in men's memories. If we lay our best in any kind at Christ's feet, He will take our poor offerings and melt them down to form part of His eternal crown. They will abide for ever in ever-widening consequences to our happy selves, and in His memory who has said, "Surely I will never forget any of their works."

LESSON XII

The New Passover

MARK xiv. 12-26

12. "And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, His disciples said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare that Thou mayest eat the Passover?

13. And He sendeth forth two of His disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.

14. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples?

15. And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

16. And His disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as He had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover.

17. And in the evening He cometh with the twelve.

18. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me.

19. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?

20. And He answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with Me in the dish.

21. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of Him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born.

22. And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is My body.

23. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them: and they all drank of it.

24. And He said unto them, This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

25. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

26. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."

THIS lesson falls into three sections—the secret preparation for the Passover (verses 12-17), the sad announcement of the betrayer (verses 18-21), and the institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26). It may be interesting to notice that in the two former of these Mark's account approximates to Luke's, while in the third he is nearer Matthew's. A comparison of the three accounts, noting the slight, but often significant variations, should be made. Nothing in the Gospels is trivial. "The dust of that land is gold."

I. The secret preparation for the Passover. The three evangelists all give the disciples' question, but only Luke tells us that it was in answer to our Lord's command to Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover. They very naturally said, "Where?" as they were all strangers in Jerusalem. Matthew may not have known of our Lord's initiative; but if Mark were, as he is, with apparent correctness, said to have been, Peter's mouthpiece in his Gospel, the reticence as to the prominence of that apostle is natural, and explains the omission of all but the bare fact of the despatch of the two. The curiously roundabout way in which they are directed to the "upper room" is only explicable on the supposition that it was intended to keep them in the dark till the last moment, so that no hint might leak from them to

Judas. Whether the token of the man with the water-pot was a preconcerted signal or an instance of our Lord's supernatural knowledge and sovereign sway, his employment as a silent and probably unconscious guide testifies to Christ's wish for that last hour to be undisturbed. A man carrying a water-pot, which was woman's special task, would be a conspicuous figure even in the festival crowds. The message to the householder implies that he recognised "the Master" as his Master, and was ready to give up at His requisition even the chamber which he had prepared for his own family celebration of the feast.

Thus instructed, the two trusted apostles left Bethany, early in the day, without a clew of their destination reaching Judas's hungry watchfulness. Evidently they did not return, and in the evening Jesus led the others straight to the place. Mark says that He came "with the twelve"; but he does not mean thereby to specify the number, but to define the class, of His attendants.

Each figure in this preparatory scene yields important lessons. Our Lord's earnest desire to secure that still hour before pushing out into the storm speaks pathetically of His felt need of companionship and strengthening, as well as of His self-forgetting purpose to help His handful of bewildered followers and His human longing to live

in faithful memories. His careful arrangements bring vividly into sight the limitations of His manhood, in that He, by whom "all things consist," had to contrive and plan in order to baffle for a moment His pursuers. And, side by side with the lowliness, as ever, is the majesty; for while He stoops to arrange, He sees with superhuman certitude what will happen, moves with secret and sovereign sway, unconscious feet, and in royal tones claims possession of His servant's possessions.

The two messengers, sent out with instructions which would only guide them half-way to their destination, and obliged, if they were to move at all, to trust absolutely to His knowledge, are but specimens of the obedience still required. He sends us out still on a road full of sharp turnings round which we cannot see. We get light enough for the first stage; and when it is traversed, the second will be plainer.

The man with the water-pot reminds us how little we may be aware of the Hand which guides us, or of our uses in His plans. "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me." How little the poor water-bearer knew who were following, or dreamed that he and his load would be remembered for ever!

The householder responded at once, and gladly, to the authoritative message, which does not ask a favour,

but demands a right. Probably he had intended to celebrate the Passover with his own family, in the large chamber on the roof, with the cool evening air about it, and the moonlight sleeping around. But he gladly gives it up. Are we as ready to surrender our cherished possessions for His use?

II. The sad announcement of the traitor (verses 18-21). As the Revised Version indicates more clearly than the Authorised, the purport of the announcement was not merely that the betrayer was an apostle, but that he was to be known by his dipping his hand into the common dish at the same moment as our Lord. The prophetic psalm would have been abundantly fulfilled though Judas's fingers had never touched Christ's; but the minute accomplishment should teach us that Jewish prophecy was the voice of Divine foreknowledge, and embraced small details as well as large tendencies. Many hands dipped with Christ's, and so the sign was not unmistakably indicative, and hence was privately supplemented, as John tells us, by the giving of the sop. The uncertainty as to the indications of the token is reflected by the reiterated questions of the apostles, which, in the Greek, are cast in a form which anticipates a negative answer: "Surely not I?" Mark omits the audacious hypocrisy of Judas's question in the same

form, and Christ's curt, sad answer which Matthew gives. His brief and vivid sketch is meant to fix attention on the unanimous shuddering horror of these faithful hearts at the thought that they could be thus guilty—a horror which was not the child of presumptuous self-confidence, but of hearty, honest love. They thought it impossible, as they felt the throbbing of their own hearts—and yet—and yet—might it not be? As they probed their hearts deeper, they became dimly aware of dark gulfs of possible unfaithfulness half visible there, and so betook themselves to their Master, and strengthened their loyalty by the question which breathed at once detestation of the treason and humble distrust of themselves. It is well to feel and speak the strong recoil from sin of a heart loyal to Jesus. It is better to recognise the sleeping snakes, the possibilities of evil in ourselves, and to take to Christ our ignorance and self-distrust. It is wiser to cry "Is it I?" than to boast "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Our Lord answers the questions by a still more emphatic repetition of the distinctive mark, and then, in verse 21, speaks deep words of mingled pathos, dignity, and submission. The voluntariness of His death, and its uniqueness as His own act of return to His eternal

home, are contained in that majestic "goeth," which asserts the impotence of the betrayer and his employers, without the Lord's own consent. On the other hand, the necessity to which He willingly bowed is set forth in that "as it written of Him." And what sadness and lofty consciousness of His own sacred personality and judicial authority are blended in the awful sentence on the traitor! What was He that treachery to Him should be a crime so transcendant? What right had He thus calmly to pronounce condemnation? Did He see into the future? Is it the voice of a Divine Judge, or of a man judging in his own cause, which speaks this passionless sentence? Surely none of His sayings are more fully charged with His claims to pre-existence, Divinity, and judicial authority, than this which He spoke at the very moment when the traitor's plot was on the verge of success.

III. The institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26). Mark's account is the briefest of the three, and his version of Christ's words the most compressed. It omits the affecting "do this for remembering Me," as pre-supposed by the very act of instituting the ordinance, which is nothing if not memorial; and it makes prominent two things—the significance of the elements, and the command to partake of them. To these must

be added Christ's attitude in blessing the bread and cup, and His distribution of them among the disciples. The Passover was to Israel the commemoration of their redemption from captivity and their birth as a nation. Jesus puts aside this Divinely-appointed and venerable festival to set in its stead the remembrance of Himself. That night, "to be much remembered of the children of Israel," is to be forgotten, and come no more into the number of the months; and its empty place is to be filled by the memory of the hours then passing. Surely His act was either arrogance or the calm consciousness of the unique significance and power of His death. Think of any mere teacher or prophet doing the like! The world would meet the preposterous claim with deserved and inextinguishable laughter. Why does it not do so with His?

Christ's view of His death is written unmistakably on the Lord's Supper. It is not merely that He wishes it rather than His life, His miracles, or words, to be kept in thankful remembrance, but that He desires one aspect of it to be held high and clear above all others. He is the true Passover Lamb, whose shed and sprinkled blood establishes new bonds of amity and new relations, with tender and wonderful reciprocal obligations between God and the "many" who truly partake of that sacrifice.

The key-words of Judaism—sacrifice, covenant, sprinkling with blood—are taken over into Christianity, and the ideas they represent are set in its centre, to be cherished as its life. The Lord's Supper is the conclusive answer to the allegation that Christ did not teach the sacrificial character and atoning power of His death. What, then, did He teach when He said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many"?

The Passover was a family festival, and that characteristic passes over to the Lord's Supper. Christ is not only the food on which we feed, but the head of the family and distributor of the banquet. He is the feast and the Governor of the feast, and all who sit at that table are brethren. One life is in them all, and they are one as partakers of One.

The Lord's Supper is a visible symbol of the Christian life, which should not only be all lived in remembrance of Him, but consists in partaking by faith of His life, and incorporating it in ours until we come to the measure of perfect men, which we reach when we can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

There is a prophetic element, as well as a commemorative and symbolic, in the Lord's Supper, which is prominent in Christ's closing words. He does not partake of the symbols which He gives; but there

comes a time, in that perfected form of the kingdom, when perfect love shall make all the citizens perfectly conformed to the perfect will of God. Then, whatsoever associations of joy, of invigoration, of festal fellowship, clustered round the wine-cup here, shall be heightened, purified, and perpetuated in the calm raptures of the heavenly feast, in which He will be Partaker, as well as Giver and Food. "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures." The King's lips touch the golden cup filled with unfoaming wine, ere He commends it to His guests. And from that feast they "go no more out," neither shall the triumphant music of its great "hymn" be followed by any Olivet or Gethsemane, or any denial, or any Calvary; but there shall be no more sorrow, nor sin, nor death; for the former things are passed away, and He has made all things new.

LESSON XIII

The Captive Christ and the Circle Round Him

ST. MARK xiv. 43-54

43. "And immediately, while He yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

44. And he that betrayed Him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; take Him and lead Him away safely.

45. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to Him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed Him.

46. And they laid their hands on Him, and took Him.

47. And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

48. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me?

49. I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took Me not: but the Scriptures must be fulfilled.

50. And they all forsook Him, and fled.

51. And there followed Him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold of him:

52. And he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

53. And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

54. And Peter followed Him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest; and He sat with the servants, and warmed Himself at the fire."

A COMPARISON of the three first Gospels in this section shows a degree of similarity, often verbal, which is best accounted for by supposing that a common

(oral) "Gospel," which had become traditionally fixed by frequent and long repetition, underlies them all. Mark's account is briefest, and grasps with sure instinct the essential points; but, even in his brevity, he pauses to tell of the young man who so nearly shared the Lord's apprehension. The canvas is narrow and crowded; but we may see unity in the picture, if we regard as the central fact the sacrilegious seizure of Jesus, and the other incidents and persons as grouped round it and Him, and reflecting various moods of men's feelings towards Him.

I. The avowed and hypocritical enemies of incarnate love. Again we have Mark's favourite "straightway," so frequent in the beginning of the Gospel, and occurring twice here, vividly painting both the sudden inburst of the crowd which interrupted Christ's words and broke the holy silence of the garden, and Judas' swift kiss. He is named—the only name but our Lord's in the section; and the depth of his sin is emphasized by adding "one of the twelve." He is not named in the next verse, but gibbeted for immortal infamy by the designation, "he that betrayed Him." There is no dilating on his crime, nor any bespattering him with epithets. The passionless narrative tells the criminal and his crime with unsparing, unmoved tones, which

have caught some echo beforehand at the Judge's voice. To name the sinner, and to state without cloak or periphrasis what his deed really was, is condemnation enough. Which of us could stand it?

Judas was foremost of the crowd. What did he feel as he passed swiftly into the shadow of the olives, and caught the first sight of Jesus? That the black depths of his spirit were agitated is plain from two things —the quick kiss, and the nauseous repetition of it. Mark says, "Straightway . . . he kissed Him much." Probably the swiftness and vehemence, so graphically expressed by these two touches, were due, not only to fear lest Christ should escape, and to hypocrisy overacting its part, but reveal a struggle with conscience and ancient affection, and a fierce determination to do the thing and have it over. Judas is not the only man who has tried to drown conscience by hurrying into and reiterating the sin from which conscience tries to keep him. The very extravagances of evil betray the divided and stormy spirit of the doer. In the darkness and confusion, the kiss was a surer token than a word or a pointing finger would have been; and simple convenience appears to have led to its selection. But what a long course of hypocrisy must have preceded, and how complete the alienation of heart must have become, before

such a choice was possible! That traitor's kiss has become a symbol for all treachery cloaked in the garb of affection. Its lessons and warnings are obvious, but this other may be added—that such audacity and nauseousness of hypocrisy is not reached at a leap, but presupposes long underground tunnels of insincere discipleship, through which a man has burrowed, unseen by others, and perhaps unsuspected by himself. Much hypocrisy of the unconscious sort precedes the deliberate and conscious.

How much less criminal and disgusting was the rude crowd at Judas's heels! Most of them were mere passive tools. The evangelist points beyond them to the greater criminals by his careful enumeration of all classes of the Jewish authorities, thus laying the responsibility directly on their shoulders, and indirectly on the nation whom they represented. The semi-tumultuous character of the crowd is shown by calling them "a multitude," and by the medley of weapons which they carried. Half-ignorant hatred, which had had ample opportunities of becoming knowledge and love, offended formalism, blind obedience to ecclesiastical superiors, the dislike of goodness—these impelled the rabble who burst into the garden of Gethsemane.

II. Incarnate love bound and patient. We may bring

together verses 46, 48, and 49, the first of which tells in simplest, briefest words the sacrilegious violence done to Jesus, while the others record His calm remonstrance. "They laid hands on Him." That was the first stage in outrage—the quick stretching of many hands to secure the unresisting prisoner. They "took Him," or, as perhaps we might better render, "They held Him fast," as would have been done with any prisoner. Surely, the quietest way of telling that stupendous fact is the best! It is easy to exclaim, and, after the fashion of some popular writers of lives of Christ, to paint fancy pictures. It is better to be sparing of words, like Mark, and silently to meditate on the patient long-suffering of the love which submitted to these indignities, and on the blindness which had no welcome but this for God manifest in the flesh. Both are in full operation to-day, and the germs of the latter are in us all.

Mark confines himself to that one of Christ's sayings which sets in the clearest light His innocence and meek submissiveness. With all its calmness and patience, it is majestic and authoritative, and sounds as if spoken from a height far above the hubbub. Its question is not only an assertion of His innocence, and therefore of his captors' guilt, but also declares the impotence of force as against Him—"Swords and staves to take

Me!" All that parade of arms was out of place, for He was no evil doer; needless, for He did not resist; and powerless, unless He chose to let them prevail. He speaks as the stainless, incarnate Son of God. He speaks also as Captain of "the noble army of martyrs," and His question may be extended to include the truth that force is in its place when used against crime, but ludicrously and tragically out of place when employed against any teacher, and especially against Christianity. Christ, in His persecuted confessors, puts the same question to the persecutors which Christ in the flesh put to His captors.

The second clause of Christ's remonstrance appeals to their knowledge of Him and His words, and to their attitude towards Him. For several days He had daily been publicly teaching in the temple. They had laid no hands on Him. Nay, some of them, no doubt, had helped to wave the palm-branches and swell the hosannas. He does not put the contrast of then and now in its strongest form, but spares them even while He says enough to bring an unseen blush to some cheeks. He would have them ask, "Why this change in us, since He is the same?" Did He deserve to be hailed as King a few short hours ago? How, then, before the palm-branches are withered, can He deserve rude

hands? Men change in their feelings to the unchanging Christ; and they who have most closely marked the rise and fall of the tide in their own hearts will be last to wonder at Christ's captors, and will most appreciate the gentleness of His rebuke and remonstrance.

The third clause rises beyond all notice of the human agents, and soars to the Divine purpose which wrought itself out through them. That Divine purpose does not make them guiltless, but it makes Jesus submissive. He bows utterly, and with no reluctance, to the Father's will, which could be wrought out through unconscious instruments, and had been declared of old by half-understanding prophets, but needed the obedience of the Son to be clear-seeing, cheerful, and complete. We, too, should train ourselves to see the hand that moves the pieces, and to make God's will our will, as becomes sons. Then Christ's calm will be ours, and, ceasing from self and conscious of God everywhere and yielding our wills, which are the self of ourselves, to Him, we shall enter into rest.

III. Rash love defending its Lord with wrong weapons (verse 47). Peter may have felt that he must do something to vindicate his recent boasting, and, with his usual headlong haste, stops neither to ask what good his sword is likely to do, nor to pick his man and take deliberate

aim at him. If swords were to be used, they should do something more effectual than hacking off a poor servant's ear. There was love in the foolish deed, and a certain heroism in braving the chance of a return thrust or capture, which should go to Peter's credit. If he alone struck a blow for his Master, it was because the others were more cowardly, not more enlightened, Peter has had rather hard measure about this matter. and is condemned by some of us who would not venture a tenth part of what he ventured for his Lord then. No doubt, this was blind and blundering love, with an alloy of rashness and wish for prominence; but that is better than unloving enlightenment and caution, which is chiefly solicitous about keeping its own ears on. It is also worse than love which sees and reflects the image of the meek Sufferer whom it loves. Christ and His cause are to be defended by other weapons. Christian heroism endures and does not smite. Not only swords, but bitter words, which wound worse than they, are forbidden to Christ's soldier. We are ever being tempted to fight Christ's battles with the world's weapons; and many a "defender of the faith" in later days, perhaps even in this very enlightened day, has repeated Peter's fault with less excuse than he, and with very little of either his courage or his love.

IV. Cowardly love forsaking its Lord (verse 50). "They all forsook Him, and fled." And who will venture to say that he would not have done so too? The tree that can stand such a blast must have deep roots. The Christ whom they forsook was, to them, but a fragment of the Christ whom we know; and the fear which scattered them was far better founded and more powerful than anything which the easy-going Christians of to-day have to resist. Their flight may teach us to place little reliance on our emotions, however genuine and deep, and to look for the security for our continual adherence to Christ, not to our fluctuating feelings, but to His stedfast love. We keep close to Him, not because our poor fingers grasp His hand—for that grasp is always feeble, and often relaxed—but because His strong and gentle hand holds us with a grasp which nothing can loosen. Whoso trusts in his own love to Christ builds on sand, but whoso trusts in Christ's love to him builds on rock.

V. Adventurous curiosity put to flight (verses 51, 52). Probably this young man was Mark. Only he tells the incident, which has no bearing on the course of events, and was of no importance but to the person concerned. He has put himself unnamed in a corner of his picture, as monkish painters used to do, content to associate

himself even thus with his Lord. His hastily cast on covering seems to show that he had been roused from sleep. Mingled love and curiosity and youthful adventurousness made him bold to venture where apostles had fled. No effort appears to have been made to stop their flight; but he is laid hold of, and, terrified at his own rashness, wriggles himself out of his captors' hands. The whole incident singularly recalls his behaviour on Paul's first missionary journey. There are the same adventurousness, the same inconsiderate entrance on perilous paths, the same ignominious and hasty retreat at the first whistle of the bullets. A man who pushes himself needlessly into difficulties and dangers without estimating their force is pretty sure to take to his heels as soon as he feels them, and to cut as undignified a figure as this naked fugitive.

VI. Love frightened, but following (verse 54). Fear had driven Peter but a little way. Love soon drew him and John back. Sudden and often opposite impulses moved his conduct and ruffled the surface of his character, but, deep down the core, was loyal love. He followed, but afar off: though afar off, he did follow. If the distance betrayed his terror, the following witnessed his bravery. He is not a coward who is afraid, but he who lets his fear hinder him from duty or drive him to flight. What

is all Christian living but following Christ afar off? And do the best of us do more, though we have less apology for our distance than Peter had? "Leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps," said he, long after, and perhaps remembered both that morning and the other by the lake when he was bidden to leave other servants' tasks to the Master's disposal, and, for his own part, to follow Him.

His love pushed him into a dangerous place. He was in bad company among the inferior sort of servants huddled around the fire that cold morning, at the lower end of the hall; and as its light flickered on his face, he was sure to be recognised. But we have not now to do with his denial. Rather he is the type of a true disciple, coercing his human weakness and cowardice to yield to the attraction which draws him to his Lord, and restful in the humblest place where he can catch a glimpse of His face, and so be, as he long after alleged it as his chief title to authority to have been, "a witness of the sufferings of Christ."

LESSON XIV

The Condemnation which Condemns the Judges

St. Mark xiv. 55-65

55. "And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put Him to death; and found none.

56. For many bare false witness against Him, but their witness agreed not together.

57. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against Him, saying,

58. We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.

59. But neither so did their witness agree together.

60. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee?

61. But He held His peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, and said unto Him, Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

62. And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

63. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

64. Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned Him to be guilty of death.

65. And some began to spit on Him, and to cover His face, and to buffet Him, and to say unto Him, Prophesy: and the servants did strike Him with the palms of their hands

MARK brings out three stages in our Lord's trial by the Jewish authorities—their vain attempts to find evidence against Him, which were met by His silence; His own majestic witness to Himself, which

was met by a unanimous shriek of condemnation; and the rude mockery of the underlings. The other evangelists, especially John, supply many illuminative details; but the essentials are here, and it is only in criticising the Gospels that a summary and a fuller narrative are dealt with as contradictory. These three stages naturally divide our lesson.

I. The judges with evil thoughts, the false witnesses, and the silent Christ (verses 55-61). The criminal is condemned before He is tried. The judges have made up their minds before they sit, and the Sanhedrin is not a court of justice, but a slaughter-house, where murder is to be done under sanction of law. Mark, like Matthew, notes the unanimity of the "council," to which Joseph of Arimathea—the one swallow which does not make a summer—appears to have been the only exception; and he probably was absent, or, if present, was silent. He did "not consent"; but we are not told that he opposed. That ill-omened unanimity measures the nation's sin. Flagrant injustice and corruption in high places is possible only when society as a whole is corrupt or indifferent to corruption. This prejudging of a case from hatred of the accused as a destroyer of sacred tradition, and this hunting for evidence to bolster up a foregone conclusion, are pre-eminently the vices of

ecclesiastical tribunals not of Jewish Sanhedrin or papal inquisition only. Where judges look for witnesses for the prosecution, plenty will be found ready to curry favour by lies. The eagerness to find witnesses against Jesus is witness for Him, as showing that nothing in His life or teaching was sufficient to warrant their murderous purpose. His judges condemn themselves in seeking grounds to condemn Him, for they thereby show that their real motive was personal spite, or, as Caiaphas suggested, political expediency.

The single specimen of the worthless evidence given may be either a piece of misunderstanding or of malicious twisting of innocent words; nor can we decide whether the witnesses contradicted one another or each himself. The former is the more probable, as the fundamental principle of the Jewish law of evidence ("two or three witnesses") would, in that case, rule out the testimony. The saying which they garble meant the very opposite of what they made it mean. It represented Jesus as the restorer of that which Israel should destroy. It referred to His body which is the true temple; but the symbolic temple "made with hands" is so inseparably connected with the real, that the fate of the one determines that of the other. Strangely significant, therefore, is it, that the rulers heard again, though distorted, at

that moment when *they* were on their trial, the far-reaching sentence, which might have taught them that in slaying Jesus they were throwing down the temple and all which centred in it, and that by His resurrection, His own act, He would build up again a new polity which yet was but the old transfigured, even "the church, which is His body?" His work destroys nothing but "the works of the devil." He is the restorer of the Divine ordinances and gifts which men destroy, and His death and resurrection bring back in nobler form all the good things lost by sin, "the desolations of many generations." The history of all subsequent attacks on Christ is mirrored here. The foregone conclusion, the evidence sought as an after-thought to give a colourable pretext, the material found in twisting His teaching, the blindness which accuses Him of destroying what He restores, and fancies itself as preserving what it is destroying, have all reappeared over and over again.

Our Lord's silence is not only that of meekness, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb." It is the silence of innocence, and, if we may use the word concerning Him, of scorn. He will not defend Himself to such judges, nor stoop to repel evidence which they knew to be worthless. But there is also something very solemn and judicial in His locked lips. They had ever been

ready to open in words of loving wisdom; but now they are fast closed, and this is the penalty for despising, that He ceases to speak. Deaf ears make a dumb Christ. What will happen when Jesus and His judges change places, as they will one day do? When He says to each, "Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these, thy sins, witness against thee?" each will be silent with the consciousness of guilt and of just condemnation by His all-knowing justice.

II. Christ's majestic witness to Himself received with a shriek of condemnation. What a supreme moment that was when the head of the hierarchy put this question and received the unambiguous answer! The veriest impostor asserting Messiahship had a right to have His claims examined; but a howl of hypocritical horror is all which Christ's evoke. The high priest knew well enough what Christ's answer would be. Why, then, did he not begin by questioning Jesus, and do without the witnesses? Probably because the council wished to find some pretext for His condemnation without bringing up the real reason; for it looked ugly to condemn a man for claiming to be Messias, and to do it without examining His credentials. The failure, however, of the false witnesses compelled the council to "show their hands," and to hear and reject our Lord solemnly and, so to speak,

officially, laying His assertion of dignity and office before them, as the tribunal charged with the duty of examining His proofs. The question is so definite as to imply a pretty full and accurate knowledge of our Lord's teaching about Himself. It embraces two points—office and nature; for "the Christ" and "the Son of the Blessed" are not equivalents. The latter points to our Lord's declarations that He was the Son of God, and is an instance of the later Jewish superstition which avoided using the Divine name. Loving faith delights in the name of the Lord. Dead formalism changes reverence into dread, and will not speak it. Sham reverence, feigned ignorance, affected wish for information, the false show of judicial impartiality, and other lies and vices not a few, are condensed in the question; and the fact that the judge had to ask it and to hear the answer, is an instance of a Divine purpose working through evil men, and compelling reluctant lips to speak words the meaning and bearing of which they little know. Jesus could not leave such a challenge unanswered. Silence then would have been abandonment of His claims. It was fitting that the representatives of the nation should, at that decisive moment, hear Him declare Himself Messiah. It was not fitting that He should be condemned on any other ground. In that answer, and its

reception by the council, the nation's rejection of Jesus is, as it were, focussed and compressed. This was the end of centuries of training by miracle, prophet and psalmist—the saddest instance in man's long, sad history of his awful power to frustrate God's patient educating! Our Lord's majestic "I am," in one word answers both parts of the question, and then passes on, with strange calm and dignity, to point onwards to the time when the criminal will be the judge, and the judges will stand at His bar. "The Son of man," His ordinary designation of Himself, implies His true manhood, and His representative character, as perfect man, or, to use modern language, the "realised ideal" of humanity. In the present connection, its employment in the same sentence as His assertion that He is the Son of God, goes deep into the mystery of His twofold nature, and asserts that His manhood had a supernatural origin, and wielded Divine prerogatives. Accordingly there follows the explicit prediction of His assumption of the highest of these after His death. The cross was as plain to Him as ever; but beyond it gleamed the crown and the throne. He anticipates "sitting on the right hand of power," which implies repose, enthronement, judicature, investiture with omnipotence, and administration of the universe. He anticipates "coming in the clouds of

heaven," which distinctly claims to be the future Judge of the world. His hearers could scarcely fail to discern the reference to Daniel's prophecy.

Was ever the irony of history more pungently exemplified than in an Annas and Caiaphas holding up hands of horror at the "blasphemies" of Jesus? They rightly took His words to mean more than the claim of Messiahship as popularly understood. To say that He was the Christ was not "blasphemy," but a claim demanding examination; but to say that He, the Son of man, was Son of God, and supreme Judge, was so, according to their canons. How unconsciously the exclamation, "What need we further witnesses?" betrays the purpose for which the witnesses had been sought, as being simply His condemnation! They were "needed" to compass His death, which the council now gleefully feels to be secured. So with precipitate unanimity they vote. And this was Israel's welcome to their King, and the outcome of all their history! And it was the destruction of the national life. That howl of condemnation pronounced sentence on themselves and on the whole order of which they were the heads. The prisoner's eyes alone saw then what we and all men may now see —the handwriting on the wall of the high priest's palace "Weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

III. The savage mockers and the patient Christ (verse 65). There is an evident antithesis between the "all" of verse 64 and the "some" of verse 65, which shows that the inflictors of the indignities were certain members of the council, whose fury carried them beyond all bounds of decency. The subsequent mention of the "servants" confirms this, especially when we adopt the more accurate rendering of the Revised Version, "received Him with blows." Mark's account, then, is this: that, as soon as the unanimous howl of condemnation had been uttered, some of the "judges" (!) fell upon Jesus with spitting, and clumsy ridicule, and downright violence, and that afterwards He was handed over to the underlings, who were not slow to copy the example set them at the upper end of the hall. It was not an ignorant mob who thus answered His claims, but the leaders and teachers—the *crême de la crême* of the nation. A wild beast lurks below the Pharisee's long robes and phylacteries; and the more men have changed a living belief in religion for a formal profession, the more fiercely antagonistic are they to every attempt to realise its precepts and hopes. The "religious" men who mock Jesus in the name of traditional religion are by no means an extinct species. It is of little use to shudder at the blind cruelty of dead scribes and priests. Let us

rather remember that the seeds of their sins are in us all, and take care to check their growth. What a volcano of hellish passion bursts out here! "Spitting" expresses disgust; blinding and asking for the names of the smiters is a clumsy attempt at wit and ridicule; "buffeting" is the last unrestrained form of hate and malice. The world has always paid its teachers and benefactors in such coin; but all other examples pale before this saddest, transcendant instance. Love is repaid by hate; a whole nation is blind to supreme and unspotted goodness; teachers steeped in law and prophets cannot see Him of and for whom law and prophets witnessed and were, when He stands before them. The sin of sins is the failure to recognise Jesus for what He is. His person and claims are the touch-stone which tries every beholder of what sort he is.

How wonderful the silent patience of Jesus! He withholds not His face "from shame and spitting." He gives "His back to the smiters." Meek endurance and passive submission are not all which we have to behold there. This is more than an uncomplaining martyr. This is the sacrifice for the world's sin; and His bearing of all that men can inflict is more than heroism. It is redeeming love. His sad, loving eyes, wide open below their bandage, saw and pitied each rude smiter,

even as He sees us all. They were and are eyes of infinite tenderness, ready to beam forgiveness; but they were and are the eyes of the Judge, who sees and repays His foes, as those who smite Him will one day find out.

LESSON XV

Christ and Pilate: the True King and His Counterfeit

St. Mark xv. 1-20

1. "And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate.

2 And Pilate asked Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And He answering said unto him, Thou sayest it.

3. And the chief priests accused Him of many things: but He answered nothing.

4. And Pilate asked Him again, saying, Answerest Thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against Thee.

5. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.

6. Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired.

7. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.

8. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire Him to do as He had ever done unto them.

9. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?

10. For He knew that the chief priests had delivered Him for envy.

11. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.

12. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews?

13. And they cried out again, Crucify Him.

14. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath He done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify Him.

15. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged Him, to be crucified.

16. And the soldiers led Him

away into the hall, called Prætorium: and they call together the whole band.

17. And they clothed Him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about His head.

18. And began to salute Him, Hail, King of the Jews!

19. And they smote Him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon Him, and bowing their knees worshipped Him.

20. And when they had mocked Him, they took off the purple from Him, and put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him."

THE so-called trial of Jesus by the rulers turned entirely on His claim to be Messias; His examination by Pilate turns entirely on His claim to be king. The two claims are indeed one, but the political aspect is distinguishable from the higher one; and it was the Jewish rulers' trick to push it exclusively into prominence before Pilate in the hope that he might see in the claim an incipient insurrection, and might mercilessly stamp it out. It was a new part for them to play to hand over leaders of revolt to the Roman authorities, and a governor with any common sense must have suspected that there was something hid below such unusual loyalty. What a moment of degradation and of treason against Israel's sacredest hopes that was when its rulers dragged Jesus to Pilate on such a charge! Mark follows the same method of condensation, and discarding of all but the essentials, as in the other parts of his narrative. He brings out three points—the hearing before Pilate, the popular vote for Barabbas, and the soldiers' mockery.

I. The true King at the bar of the apparent ruler (verses 1-6). The contrast between appearance and reality was never more strongly drawn than when Jesus stood as a prisoner before Pilate. The One is helpless, bound, alone; the other, invested with all the externals of power. But which is the stronger? and in which hand is the sceptre? On the lowest view of the contrast it is ideas *versus* swords. On the higher and truer, it is the incarnate God, mighty because voluntarily weak, and man "dressed in a little brief authority," and weak because insolently "making his power his god." Impotence, fancying itself strong, assumes sovereign authority over omnipotence clothed in weakness. The phantom ruler sits in judgment on the true King. Pilate holding Christ's life in his hand is the crowning paradox of history and the mystery of self-abasing love. One exercise of the Prisoner's will and His chains would have snapped, and the governor lain dead on the marble "pavement."

The two hearings are parallel, and yet contrasted. In each there are two stages—the self-attestation of Jesus and the accusations of others; but the order is different. The rulers begin with the witnesses, and, foiled there, fall back on Christ's own answer. Pilate, with Roman directness and a touch of contempt for the accusers,

goes straight to the point, and first questions Jesus. His question was simply as to our Lord's regal pretensions He cared nothing about Jewish "superstitions" unless they threatened political disturbance. It was nothing to him whether or no one crazy fanatic more fancied himself "the Messiah," whatever that might be. Was He going to fight? That was all which Pilate had to look after. He is the very type of the hard, practical Roman, with a "practical" man's contempt for ideas and sentiments, sceptical about the possibility of getting hold of "truth," and too careless to wait for an answer to his question about it; loftily ignorant of and indifferent to the notions of the troublesome people he ruled, but alive to the necessity of keeping them in good humour, and unscrupulous enough to strain justice and unhesitatingly sacrifice so small a thing as an innocent life to content them. What could such a man see in Jesus but a harmless visionary? He had evidently made up his mind that there was no mischief in Him, or he would not have questioned Him as to His kingship. It was a new thing for the rulers to hand over dangerous patriots, and Pilate had common sense enough to suspect that such unusual loyalty concealed something else, and that if Jesus had really been an insurrectionary leader, He would never have fallen into Pilate's power. Accordingly,

he gives no serious attention to the case, and his question has a certain half-amused, half-pitying ring about it. "Thou a king?"—poor, helpless peasant! A strange specimen of royalty this! How constantly the same blindness is repeated, and the strong things of this world despise the weak, and material power smiles pityingly at the helpless impotence of the principles of Christ's gospel, which yet will one day shatter it to fragments, like a potter's vessel! The phantom ruler judges the real King to be a powerless shadow, while himself is the shadow and the other the substance. There are plenty of Pilates to-day who judge and misjudge the King of Israel.

The silence of Jesus in regard to the eager accusations corresponds to His silence before the false witnesses. The same reasons dictated both. His silence is His most eloquent answer. It calmly passes by all that babble of envenomed tongues as needing no answer, and as utterly irrelevant. Answered, they would have lived in the Gospels; unanswered, they are buried. Christ can afford to let many of His foes alone. Contradictions and confutations keep slanders and heresies above water, which the law of gravitation would dispose of, if they were left alone.

Pilate's wonder might and should have led him further

It should have prompted to further inquiry, and that might have issued in clearer knowledge. It was the little glimmer of light at the far-off end of his cavern, which, travelled towards, might have brought him into free air and broad day. One great part of his crime was neglecting the faint monitions of which he was conscious. His light may have been faint, but it would have brightened; and he quenched it. He stands as a tremendous example of possibilities missed, and of the tragedy of a soul that has looked on Jesus, and has not yielded to the impressions made on him by the sight.

II. The people's favourite (verses 7-15). "Barabbas" means "son of the father." His very name is a kind of caricature of the "Son of the Blessed," and His character and actions present in gross form the sort of Messias whom the nation really wanted. He had headed some one of the many small riots against Rome which were perpetually sputtering up and being trampled out by an armed heel. There had been bloodshed, in which he had himself taken part ("a murderer," Acts iii. 14). And this coarse, red-handed desperado is the people's favourite, because he embodied their notions and aspirations, and had been bold enough to do what every man of them would have done if he had dared. He thought and felt, as they did, that freedom was to be

won by the sword. The popular hero is like a mirror which reflects the popular mind. He echoes the popular voice, a little improved or exaggerated. Jesus had taught what the people did not care to hear, and given blessings which even the recipients soon forgot, and lived a life whose beauty of holiness oppressed and rebuked the common life of men. What chance had truth and goodness and purity, against the sort of bravery that slashes with a sword, and is not elevated by inconvenient reach of thought or beauty of character above the mob? Even now, after nineteen centuries of Christ's influence have modified the popular ideals, what chance have they? Are the popular "heroes" of Christian nations saints, teachers, lovers of men, in whom their Christ-likeness is the thing venerated? The old saying that the voice of the people is the voice of God receives an instructive commentary in the vote for Barabbas and against Jesus. That was what a plebiscite for the discovery of the people's favourite came to. What a reliable method of finding the best man universal suffrage, manipulated by wire-pullers like these priests, is! and how wise the people are who let it guide their judgments, or, still wiser, who fret their lives out in angling for its approval! Better be condemned with Jesus than adopted with Barabbas.

That fatal choice revealed the character of the choosers, both in their hostility and admiration; for excellence hated shows what we ought to be and are not, and grossness or vice admired shows what we would fain be if we dared. It is the tragic sign that Israel had not learned the rudiments of the lesson which "at sundry times and in divers manners" God had been teaching them. In it the nation renounced its Messianic hopes, and with its own mouth pronounced its own sentence. It convicts them of insensibility to the highest truth, of blindness to the most effulgent light, of ingratitude for the richest gifts. It is the supreme instance of short-lived, unintelligent emotion, inasmuch as many who on Friday joined in the roar, "Crucify Him!" had on Sunday shouted "Hosanna!" till they were hoarse.

Pilate plays a cowardly and unrighteous part in the affair, and tries to make amends to himself for his politic surrender of a man whom he knew to be innocent, by taunts and sarcasm. He seems to see a chance to release Jesus, if he can persuade the mob to name Him as the prisoner to be set free, according to custom. His first proposal to them was apparently dictated by a genuine interest in Jesus, and a complete conviction that Rome had nothing to fear from this "King." But there are also a sneer in the question, at such pauper royalty, as it

looked to him, and a kind of scornful condescension in acknowledging their right of choice. He consults their wishes for once, but there is haughty consciousness of mastery in his way of doing it. His appeal is to the people, as against the priests, whose motives he had penetrated. But in his very effort to save Jesus he condemns himself; for, if he knew that they had delivered Christ for envy, his plain duty was to set the prisoner free, as innocent of the only crime of which he ought to take cognizance. So his attempt to shift the responsibility off his own shoulders is a piece of cowardice and a dereliction of duty. His second question plunges him deeper in the mire. The people had a right to decide which was to be released, but none to settle the fate of Jesus. To put that in their hands was an unconditional surrender by Pilate, and the sneer in "whom ye call the King of the Jews" is a poor attempt to hide from them and himself that he is afraid of them. Mark puts his finger on the damning blot in Pilate's conduct when he says that his motive in condemning Jesus was his wish to content the people. The life of one poor Jew was a small price to pay for popularity. So he let policy outweigh righteousness, and, in spite of his own clear conviction, did an innocent man to death. That would be his reading of his act, and, doubtless, it did not trouble

his conscience much or long, but he would leave the judgment seat tolerably satisfied with his morning's work. How little he knew what he had done! In his ignorance lies his palliation. His crime was great, but his guilt is measured by his light, and that was small. He prostituted justice for his own ends, and he did not follow out the dawnings of light that would have led him to know Jesus. Therefore he did the most awful thing in the world's history. Let us learn the lesson which he teaches!

III. The soldiers' mockery (verses 16-20). This is characteristically different from that of the rulers. They jeered at his claim to supernatural enlightenment, and bade Him show His Messiahship by naming His smiters. The rough legionaries knew nothing about a Messiah, but it seemed to them a good jest that this poor, scourged prisoner should have called Himself a King, and so they proceed to make coarse and clumsy merriment over it. It is like the wild beast playing with its prey before killing it. The laughter is not only rough, but cruel. There was no pity for the Victim "bleeding from the Roman rods," and soon to die. And the absence of any personal hatred made this mockery more hideous. Jesus was nothing to them but a Prisoner whom they were to crucify, and their mockery was sheer brutality and savage

delight in torturing. The sport is too good to be kept by a few, so the whole band is gathered to enjoy it. How they would troop to the place! They get hold of some robe or cloth of the imperial colour, and of some flexible shoots of some thorny plant, and out of these they fashion a burlesque of royal trappings. Then they shout, as they would have done to Cæsar, "Hail, King of the Jews!" repeating again with clumsy iteration, the stale jest which seems to them so exquisite. Then their mood changes, and naked ferocity takes the place of ironical reverence. Plucking the mock sceptre, the reed, from His passive hand, they strike the thorn-crowned Head with it, and spit on Him while they bow in mock reverence before Him, and at last, when tired of their sport, tear off the purple, and lead Him away to the Cross.

If we think of who He was who bore all this, and of why He bore it, we may well bow, not the knee, but the heart, in endless love and thankfulness. If we think of the mockers—rude Roman soldiers, who probably could not understand a word of what they heard on the streets of Jerusalem—we shall do rightly to remember our Lord's own plea for them—"they know not what they do"—and reflect that many of us with more knowledge do really sin more against the King than they did. Their

insult was an unconscious prophecy. They foretold the basis of His dominion in the crown of thorns, and its character in the sceptre of reed, and its extent in their mocking salutations; for His Kingship is founded in suffering, wielded with gentleness, and to Him every knee shall one day bow, and every tongue confess that the King of the Jews is monarch of mankind.

LESSON XVI

The Death which Gives Life

ST. MARK XV. 21–39

21. "And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His cross.

22. And they bring Him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.

23. And they gave Him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but He received it not.

24. And when they had crucified Him, they parted His garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

25. And it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.

26. And the superscription of His accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

27. And with Him they crucify two thieves; the one on His right hand, and the other on His left.

28. And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors.

29. And they that passed by railed on Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days,

30. Save Thyself, and come down from the cross.

31. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; Himself He cannot save.

32. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with Him reviled Him.

33. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

34. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

35. And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, He calleth Elias.

36. And one ran and filled a spunge full of vinegar, and

put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take Him down.

37. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

38. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

39. And when the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God."

THE narrative of the crucifixion is, in Mark's hands, almost entirely a record of what was done to Jesus, and scarcely touches what was done by Him. We are shown the executioners, the jeering rabble, the triumphant priests, the fellow-sufferers reviling; but the only glimpses we get of Him are His refusal of the stupefying draught, His loud cries, and His giving up the ghost. The narrative is perfectly calm, as well as reverentially reticent. It would have been well if our religious literature had copied the example, and treated the solemn scene in the same fashion. Mark's inartificial style of linking long paragraphs with the simple "and" is peculiarly observable here, where every verse but 30 and 32, which are both quotations, begins with it. The whole section is one long sentence, each fresh number of which adds a fresh touch to the tragic picture. The monotonous repetition of "and," "and," "and," gives the effect of an endless succession of the waves of sorrow, pain, and contumely which broke over that sacred head. We shall best simply note each billow as it breaks.

The first point is the impressing of Simon to bear the Cross. That was not dictated by compassion so much as by impatience. Apparently the weight was too heavy for Jesus, and the pace could be quickened by making the first man they could lay hold of help to carry the load. Mark adds that Simon was the "father of Alexander and Rufus," whom he supposes to need no introduction to his readers. There is a Rufus mentioned in Romans xvi. 13 as being, with his mother, members of the Roman Church. Mark's Gospel has many traces of being primarily intended for Romans. Possibly these two Rufuses are the same; and the conjecture may be allowable that the father's fortuitous association with the crucifixion led to the conversion of himself and his family, and that his sons were of more importance or fame in the Church than he was. Perhaps, too, he is the "Simeon called Niger" (bronzed by the hot African sun), who was a prophet of Antioch, and stands by the side of a Cyrenian (Acts xiii. 1). It is singular that he should be the only one of all the actors in the crucifixion who is named; and the fact suggests his subsequent connection with the Church. If so, the seeking love of God found him by a strange way. On what apparently trivial accidents a life may be pivoted, and how much may depend on turning to right or left in a walk! In

this bewildering network of interlaced events, which each ramify in so many directions, the only safety is to keep fast hold of God's hand, and to take good care of the purity of our motives, and let results alone.

The next verse brings us to Golgotha, which is translated by the three evangelists, who give it as meaning "the place of a skull." The name may have been given to the place of execution with grim suggestiveness; or, more probably, Conder's recent identification, is plausible, which points to a little, rounded, skull-shaped knoll, close outside the northern wall, as the site of the crucifixion.[1] In that case, the name would originally describe the form of the height, and be retained as specially significant in view of its use as the place of execution.

That was the "place" to which Israel led its King! The place of death becomes a place of life, and from the mournful soil where the bones of evil-doers lay bleaching in the sun springs the fountain of water of life.

[1] The proposal of identifying this hill with Calvary was made nearly thirty years before it was accepted by Captain Conder. It was advocated in print by Otto Thenius, a German, in 1849, and by Fisher Howe, an American, in 1871. All this was shown by Dr. Merrill in *The Sunday School Times* for June 23rd, 1888. It will be observed that Canon Tristram speaks of having recognised this hill as the site of Calvary as long ago as 1858—twenty years prior to its mention by Captain Conder.

Arrived at that doleful place, a small touch of kindness breaks the monotony of cruelty, if it be not merely a part of the ordinary routine of executions. The stupefying potion would diminish, but would therefore protract the pain, and was possibly given for the latter rather than the former effect. But Jesus "received it not." He will not, by any act of His, lessen the bitterness. He will drink to the dregs the cup which His Father hath given Him, and therefore He will not drink of the numbing draught. It is a small matter comparatively, but it is all of a piece with the greater things. The spirit of His whole course of voluntary, cheerful endurance of all the sorrows needful to redeem the world, is expressed in His silent turning away from the draught which might have alleviated physical suffering, but at the cost of dulling conscious surrender.

The act of crucifixion is but named in a subsidiary clause, as if the writer turned away, with eyes veiled in reverence, from the sight of man's utmost sin and Christ's utmost mystery of suffering love. He can describe the attendant circumstances, but his pen refuses to dwell upon the central fact. The highest art and the simplest natural feeling both know that the fewest words are the most eloquent. He will not expressly mention the indignity done to the sacred Body in which "dwelt all

the fulness of the Godhead," but leaves it to be inferred from the parting of Christ's raiment, the executioner's perquisite. He had nothing else belonging to Him, and of even that poor property He is spoiled. According to John's more detailed account, the soldiers made an equal parting of His garments except the seamless robe, for which they threw lots. So the "parting" applies to one portion, and the "casting lots" to another. The incident teaches two things: on the one hand, the stolid indifference of the soldiers, who had crucified many a Jew, and went about their awful work as a mere piece of routine duty; and, on the other hand, the depth of the abasement and shame to which Jesus bowed for our sakes. "Naked shall I return thither" was true in the most literal sense of Him whose earthly life began with His laying aside His garments of Divine glory, and ended with rude legionaries parting "His raiment" among them.

Mark alone tells the hour at which Jesus was nailed to the Cross (verse 25). Matthew and Luke specify the sixth and ninth hours as the times of the darkness and of the death; but to Mark we owe our knowledge of the fact that for six slow hours Jesus hung there, tasting death drop by drop. At any moment of all these sorrow-laden moments He could have come down from the Cross, if

He would. At each, a fresh exercise of His loving will to redeem kept Him there.

The writing on the Cross is given here in the most condensed fashion (verse 26). The one important point is that His "accusation" was "King of the Jews." It was the official statement of the reason for His crucifixion, put there by Pilate as a double-barrelled sarcasm, hitting both Jesus and the nation. The rulers winced under the taunt, and tried to get it softened; but Pilate sought to make up for his unrighteous facility in yielding Jesus to death, by obstinacy and jeers. So the inscription hung there, a truth deeper than its author or its angry readers knew, and a prophecy which has not received all its fulfilment yet.

The narrative comes back, in verse 27, to the sad catalogue of the insults heaped on Jesus. Verse 28 is probably spurious here, as the Revised Version takes it to be; but it truly expresses the intention of the crucifixion of the thieves as being to put Him in the same class as they, and to suggest that He was a ringleader, pre-eminent in evil. Possibly the two robbers may have been part of Barabbas's band, who had been thieves disguised as patriots; and, if so, the insult was all the greater. But, in any case, the meaning of it was to bring him down, in the eyes of beholders, to the level

of vulgar criminals. If a Cranmer or a Latimer had been bound to the stake with a housebreaker or a cut-throat, that would have been a feeble image of the malicious contumely thus flung at Jesus; but His love had identified Him with the worst sinners in a far deeper and more real way, and not a crime had stained these men's hands but its weight pressed on Him. He numbers Himself with transgressors, that they may be numbered with His saints.

Then follows (verses 29-32) the threefold mockery by people, priests, and fellow-sufferers. That is spread over three hours, and is all which Mark has to tell of them. Other evangelists give us words spoken by Jesus; but this narrative has only one of the seven "words from the Cross," and gives us the picture rather of the silent Sufferer, bearing in meek resolution all that men can lay on Him. Both pictures are true, for the words are too few to make notable breaches in the silence. The mockery harps on the old themes, and witnesses at once the malicious cruelty of the mockers and the innocence of the Victim, at whom even such malice could find nothing to fling except these stale taunts. The chance passengers, of whom there would be a stream to and from the adjacent city gate, "wag their heads" in gratified and fierce hate. The calumny of

the discredited witnesses, although even the biassed judges had not dared to treat it as true, has lodged in the popular mind, and been accepted as proved. Lies are not killed when they are shown to be lies. They travel faster than truth. Ears were greedily open for the false witnesses' evidence which had been closed to Christ's gracious teaching. The charge that He was a would-be destroyer of the Temple obliterated all remembrance of miracles and benefits, and fanned the fire of hatred in men whose zeal for the Temple was the substitute for religion. Are there any of them left nowadays—people who have no real heart-hold of Christianity, but are fiercely antagonistic to supposed destroyers of its externals, and not over-particular as to the evidence against them? These mockers thought that Christ's being fastened to the Cross was a *reductio ad absurdum* of His claim to build the Temple. How little they knew that it led straight to that rebuilding, or that they, and not He, were indeed the destroyers of the holy house which they thought they honoured, and had really made "desolate"!

The priests do not take up the people's mockery, for they know that it is based upon a falsehood; but they scoff at His miracles, which they assume to be disproved by His crucifixion. Their venomous gibe is profoundly

true, and goes to the very heart of the gospel. Precisely because "He saved others," therefore "Himself He cannot save"—not, as they thought, for want of power, but because His will was fixed to obey the Father and to redeem His brethren; and therefore He must die and cannot deliver Himself. But the necessity and inability both depend on His will. The priests, however, take up the other part of the people's scoff. They unite the two grounds of condemnation in the names "the Christ, the King of Israel," and think that both are disproved by His hanging there. But the Cross is the throne of the King. A sacrificial death is the true work of the Messiah of law, prophecy, and psalm; and because He did not come down from the Cross, therefore is He crowned with glory and honour in heaven, and rules over grateful and redeemed hearts on earth.

The midday darkness lasted three hours, during which no word or incident is recorded. It was nature Divinely draped in mourning over the sin of sins, the most tragic of deaths. It was a symbol of the eclipse of the Light of the world; but ere He died it passed, and the sun shone on His expiring head, in token that His death scattered the darkness and poured day on our sad night. The solemn silence was broken at last by that loud cry, the utterance of strangely-blended consciousness of

possession of God and abandonment by Him, the depths of which we can never fathom. But this we know: that our sins, not His, wove the veil which separated Him from His God. Such separation is the real death. Where cold analysis is out of place, reverent gratitude may draw near. Let us adore, for what we can understand speaks of a love which has taken the iniquity of us all on itself. Let us silently adore, for all words are weaker than that mystery of love.

The first hearers of that cry misunderstood it, or cruelly pretended to do so, in order to find fresh food for mockery. "Eloi" sounded like enough to "Elijah" to suggest a travesty of the piteous appeal to some of the flinty hearts around. They must have been Jews, for the soldiers knew nothing about the prophet; and if they were scribes, they could scarcely fail to recognise the reference to the Twenty-second Psalm, and to understand the cry. But the opportunity for one more cruelty was too tempting to be resisted, and savage laughter was man's response to the most pitiful prayer ever uttered. One man in all that crowd had a small touch of human pity, and, dipping a sponge in the sour drink provided for the soldiers, reached it up to the parched lips. That was no stupefying draught, and was accepted. Matthew's account is more detailed, and represents the words

spoken as intended to hinder even that solitary bit of kindness.

The end was near. The lips, moistened by the "vinegar," opened once more in that loud cry which both showed undiminished vitality and conscious victory; and then He "gave up the ghost," sending away His spirit, and dying, not because the prolonged agony had exhausted His energy, but because He chose to die. He entered through the gate of death as a conqueror, and burst its bars when He went in, and not only when He came out.

His death rent the Temple veil. The innermost chamber of the Divine Presence is open now, and sinful men have access with confidence by the faith of Him wherever He has gone before. Right into the secret of God's pavilion we can go, now and here, knowledge and faith and love treading the path which Jesus has opened, and coming to the Father by Him. Right into the blaze of the glory we shall go hereafter; for He has gone to to prepare a place for us, and when He overcame the sharpness of death He opened the gate of heaven to all believers.

Jews looked on, unconcerned and unconvinced by the pathos and triumph of such a death. But the rough soldier who commanded the executioners had no pre-

judices or hatred to blind his eyes and ossify his heart. The sight made its natural impression on him; and his exclamation, though not to be taken as a Christian confession or as using the phrase "Son of God" in in its deepest meaning, is yet the beginning of light. Perhaps, as he went thoughtfully to his barrack that afternoon, the process began which led him at last to repeat his first exclamation with deepened meaning and true faith. May we all gaze on that Cross, with fuller knowledge, with firm trust, and endless love!

LESSON XVII

How the Disciples Received the Testimony to the Resurrection

MARK xvi. 1-13

1. "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him.

2. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4. And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6. And He saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid Him.

7. But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you.

8. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

9. Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils.

10. And she went and told them that had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.

11. And they, when they had heard that He was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

12. After that He appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.

13. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them."

IT is not my business to discuss questions of harmonising or of criticism. These are in more competent hands, and I have only to deal with the narrative as it stands. Its peculiar character is very plain. The manner in which the first disciples learned the fact of the resurrection, and the disbelief with which they received it, much rather than the resurrection itself, come into view in this section. The disciples, and not the risen Lord, are shown us. There is nothing here of the earthquake, or of the descending angel, or of the terrified guard, or of our Lord's appearance to the women. The two appearances to Mary Magdalene and to the travellers to Emmaus, which, in the hands of John and Luke, are so pathetic and rich, are here mentioned with the utmost brevity, for the sake chiefly of insisting on the disbelief of the rest who heard of them. Mark's theme is mainly what the disciples thought of the testimony to the resurrection.

I. He shows us, first, bewildered love and sorrow. We leave the question whether this group of women is the same as that of which Luke records that Joanna was one, as well as the other puzzle as to harmonising the notes of time in the evangelists. May not the difference between the time of starting and that of arrival solve some of the difficulty? When all the notes are more

or less vague, and refer to the time of transition from dark to day, when every moment partakes of both and may be differently described as belonging to either, is precision to be expected? In the whirl of agitation of that morning, would anybody be at leisure to take much note of the exact minute? Are not these "discrepancies" much more valuable as confirmation of the story than precise accord would have been? It is better to try to understand the feelings of that little band than to carp at such trifles. Sorrow wakes early, and love is impatient to bring its tribute. So we can see these three women, stealing through the silent streets, leaving their abode as soon as the doleful grey of morning permitted, and reaching the rock-cut tomb while the sun was rising over Olivet. Where were Salome's ambitious hopes for her two sons now? Dead, and buried in the Master's grave. The completeness of the women's despair, as well as the faithfulness of their love, is witnessed by their purpose. They had come to anoint the body of Him to whom in life they had ministered. They had no thought of a resurrection, plainly as they had been told of it. The waves of sorrow had washed the remembrance of His assurances on that subject clean out of their minds. Truth that is only half understood, however plainly spoken, is always forgotten when the

time to apply it comes. We are told that the disbelief of the disciples in the resurrection, after Christ's plain predictions of it, is "psychologically" impossible. Such big words are imposing, but the objection is shallow. These disciples are not the only people who forgot in the hour of need the thing which it most concerned them to remember, and let the clouds of sorrow hide starry promises which would have turned mourning into dancing, and night into day. Christ's sayings about His resurrection were not understood in their, as it appears to us, obvious meaning when spoken. No wonder, then, that they were not expected to be fulfilled in their obvious meaning when He was dead. We shall have a word to say presently about the value of the fact that there was no anticipation of resurrection on the part of the disciples. For the present it is enough to note how these three loving souls confess their hopelessness in their errand. Did they not not know, too, that Joseph and Nicodemus had been beforehand with them in their labour of love? Apparently not. It might easily happen, in the confusion and dispersion, that no knowledge of this had reached them; or perhaps sorrow and agitation had driven it out of their memories; or perhaps they felt that, whether others had done the same before or no, they must do it too, not because

the loved form needed it, but because their hearts needed to do it. It was the love which must serve, not calculation of necessity, which loaded their hands with costly spices. The living Christ was pleased with the "odour of a sweet smell," from the needless spices, meant to re-anoint the dead Christ, and accepted the purpose, though it came from ignorance and was never carried out, since its deepest root was love, genuine, though bewildered.

The same absence of calm "practical common sense" is seen in the too late consideration, which never occurred to the three women till they were getting near the tomb, as to how to get into it. They do not seem to have heard of the guard; but they know that the stone is too heavy for them to move, and none of the men among the disciples had been taken into their confidence. "Why did they not think of that before? What a want of foresight!" says the cool observer. "How beautifully true to nature!" says a wiser judgment. To obey the impulse of love and sorrow without thinking, and then to be arrested on their road by a difficulty, which they might have thought of at first, but did not till they were close to it, is surely just what might have been expected of such mourners. Mark gives a graphic picture in that one word "looking up," and follows it with pic-

turesque present tenses. They had been looking down or at each other in perplexity, when they lifted their eyes to the tomb, which was probably on an eminence. What a flash of wonder would pass through their minds when they saw it open! What that might signify they would be eager to hurry to find out; but, at all events, their difficulty was at an end. When love to Christ is brought to a stand in its venturous enterprises by difficulties occurring for the first time to the mind, it is well to go close up to them; and it often happens that when we do, and look steadily at them, we see that they are rolled away, and the passage clear which we feared was hopelessly barred.

II. The calm herald of the resurrection and the amazed hearers. Apparently Mary Magdalene had turned back as soon as she saw the opened tomb, and hurried to tell that the body had been carried off, as she supposed. The guard had also probably fled before this; and so the other two women enter the vestibule, and there find the angel. Sometimes one angel, sometimes two, sometimes none, where visible there. These varying numbers are not contradiction. Many angels hovered round the spot where the greatest wonder of the universe was to be seen, "eagerly desiring to look into" that grave. The beholder's eye may have determined

their visibility. Their number may have fluctuated. Mark does not use the word "angel" at all, but leaves us to infer what manner of being he was who first proclaimed the resurrection. Note his youth, his attitude, and his attire. The angelic life is vigorous, progressive, buoyant, and alien from decay. Immortal youth belongs to them who "excel in strength," because they "do his commandments." That waiting minister shows us what the children of the resurrection shall be, and so his presence as well as his speech expounds the blessed mystery of our life in the risen Lord. The serene sitting "on the right side" is not only a vivid touch of description, but significant of restfulness and fixed contemplation, as well as of the calmness of a higher life. That still watcher knows too much to be agitated; but the less he is moved, the more he adores. His quiet contrasts with and heightens the impression of the storm of conflicting feelings in the women's tremulous natures. His garments symbolise purity and repose. How sharply the difference between heaven and earth is given in the last words of verse 5! "They were amazed," swept out of themselves in an ecstasy of bewilderment in which hope had no place. Terror, surprise, curiosity, wonder, blank incapacity to know what all this meant, made chaos in them.

The angel's words are broken up into short sentences, which have a certain dignity, and break up the astounding revelation he has to make into small pieces, which these bewildered minds can grasp. He calms their tumult of spirit. He shows them that He knows their errand. He adoringly names his Lord and theirs by the names of His manhood—His lowly home, and His ignominious death. He lingers on the thought, to him covering so profound a mystery of Divine love, that his Lord had been born, had lived in the obscure village, and died on the Cross. Then, in one word, he proclaims the stupendous fact of His resurrection as His own act,—"He is risen." This crown of all miracles, which brings life and immortality to light, and changes the whole outlook of humanity, which changes the Cross into victory, and without which Christianity is a dream and a ruin, is announced in a single word—the mightiest ever spoken but by Christ's own lips. It was fitting that angel lips should proclaim the Resurrection, as they did the Nativity, though in both "He taketh not hold of angels," and they had but a secondary share in the blessings. Yet that empty grave opened to "principalities and powers in heavenly places" a new unfolding of the manifold wisdom and love of God. The angel—a true evangelist—does not linger on the wondrous

intimation, but points to the vacant place, which would have been so drear but for his previous words, and bids them approach to verify his assurance, and with reverent wonder to gaze on the hallowed and now happy spot. A moment is granted for feeling to overflow, and certainty to be attained, and then the women are sent on their errand. Even the joy of that gaze is not to be selfishly prolonged, while others are sitting in sorrow for want of what they know. That is the law for all the Christian life. First make sure work of one's own possession of the truth, and then hasten to tell it to those who need it.

"And Peter." Mark alone gives us this. The other evangelists might pass it by; but how could Peter ever forget the balm which that message of pardon and restoration brought to him, and how could Peter's mouthpiece leave it out? Is there anything in the Gospels more beautiful, or fuller of long-suffering and thoughtful love, than that message from the risen Saviour to the denier? And how delicate the love which, by calling him Peter, not Simon, reinstates him in his official position by anticipation, even though in the subsequent full restoration scene by the lake he is thrice called Simon, before the complete effacement of the triple denial by the triple confession!

Galilee is named as the *rendezvous*, and the word employed—"goeth before you"—is that appropriate to the Shepherd in front of His flock. They had been "scattered," but are to be drawn together again. He is to precede them there—lightly indicating the new form of their relations to Him, marked during the forty days by a distance which prepared for his final withdrawal. Galilee was the home of most of them, and had been the field of His most continuous labours. There would be many disciples there, who would gather to see their risen Lord (five hundred at once); and there, rather than in Jerusalem, which had slain Him, was it fitting that He should show himself to His friends. The appearances in Jerusalem were all within a week (if we except the Ascension), and the connection in which Mark introduces them (if verse 14 be his) seems to treat them as forced on Christ by the disciples' unbelief, rather than as His original intention. It looks as if He meant to show Himself in the city only to one or two, such as Mary, Peter, and some others, but to reserve His more public appearance for Galilee.

How did the women receive the message? Mark represents them as trembling in body and in an ecstasy in mind, and as hurrying away silent with terror. Matthew says that they were full of "fear and great joy,"

and hurried away to tell the disciples. In the whirl of feeling, there were opposites blended or succeeding one another; and the one evangelist lays hold of one set, and the other of the other. It is as impossible to catalogue the swift emotions of such a moment as to separate and tabulate the hues of sunrise. The silence which Mark tells of can only refer to their demeanour as they "fled." His object is to bring out the very imperfect credence which, at the best, was given to the testimony that Christ was risen, and to paint the tumult of feeling in the breasts of its first recipients. His picture is taken from a different angle from Matthew's; but Matthew's contains the same elements, for he speaks of "fear," though he completes it by "joy."

III. The incredulity of the disciples. The two appearances to Mary Magdalene and the travellers to Emmaus are introduced mainly to record the unbelief of the disciples. A strange choice that was, of the woman who had been rescued from so low a debasement to be first to see Him! But her degradation was the measure of her love. Longing eyes, that have been washed clean by many a tear of penitent gratitude, are purged to see Jesus; and a yearning heart ever brings Him near. The unbelief of the story of the two from Emmaus seems to conflict with Luke's account, which tells that they

were met by the news of Christ's appearance to Simon. But the two statements are not contradictory. If we remember the excitement and confusion of mind in which they were, we shall not wonder if belief and unbelief followed each other, like the flow and recoil of the waves. One moment they were on the crest of the billows, and saw land ahead; the next day they were down in the trough, and saw only the melancholy surge. The very fact that Peter was believed, might make them disbelieve the travellers; for how could Jesus have been in Jerusalem and Emmaus so nearly at once?

However the two narratives be reconciled, it remains obvious that the first disciples did not believe the first witnesses of the resurrection, and that their unbelief is an important fact. It bears very distinctly on the worth of their subsequent conviction. It has special bearing on the most modern form of disbelief in the resurrection, which accounts for the belief of the first disciples on the ground that they expected Christ to rise, and that they then persuaded themselves, in all good faith, that He had risen. That monstrous theory is vulnerable at all points, but one sufficient answer is—the disciples did not expect Christ to rise again, and were so far from it that they did not believe He had risen when they were told Their original unbelief is a strong argument for

the reliableness of their final faith. What raised them from the stupor of despair and incredulity? Only one answer is "psychologically" reasonable: they at last believed because they saw. It is incredible that they were conscious deceivers; for such lives as they lived, and such a gospel as they preached, never came from liars. It is as incredible that they were unconsciously mistaken; for they were wholly unprepared for the Resurrection, and sturdily disbelieved all witnesses for it, till they saw with their own eyes, and had "many infallible proofs." Let us be thankful for their unbelief and its record, and let us seek to possess the blessing of those "that have not seen, and yet have believed'!

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